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Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs in Texas
A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs in Texas

A Phenomenological Inquiry

by

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Dedication

My success is not mine alone! Agape love from my family and friends helped me make it through the four years of "schooling" that had many highs and lows. Finding space at home, at Starbucks and Degree Solutions Group to bury my head in writing was crucial. The invaluable support of my family helped to push me to be the FIRST doctor in the family. My husband, Elroy, helped me by taking care of the house so that I could get my work completed. He also gave me good laughs as he announced to many that he would become my "personal driver" once my work is complete. My sons, Jordan and Jaylen, gave me the will power to finish. Both of my boys were in college during this time and showed me that we, as a family, can make this journey work. My mom, Lois, always checked on my spiritual and emotional wellbeing. My cohort friend, Dr. Elena Hill, reminded me to not "lay on a bed of nails." Those words pushed me through the end. My friends were my cheerleaders throughout this time and checked on me consistently. My beloved "Granny," Elizabeth, taught me the importance of education and the support that should be given to children in my path. Granny asked me to push myself as far as I could in education. I hope that I made her proud.

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Going back to school was terrifying and exciting at the same time. Walking the path to classes at the University of Texas gave me a sense of pride in my journey of changing the world and fulfilling my calling of being a lead learner in education. The University of Texas provided academic development in helping me refine the areas of greatest need that I could use, including strategies to impact the most significant group of students in an alternative education setting. CSP Cohort 27 pushed my philosophy, expanded my point of view, and comforted me when times were tough. Professor Cantú interviewed me to be accepted in the CSP program and shared how she felt I would be a good candidate and successful student for the program. She shared how she would support and encourage me any way she could. Her patience and support were well received. Professor Cantu graciously accepted the role of chair of my committee and helped me look at the little things to ensure that I could be a better writer and researcher. Dr. Rubén Olivárez always showed support and compassion for the members of the cohort and supported the dreams we each had. His relentless wisdom and experience will not be forgotten. His calls to check on me were very thoughtful and showed his commitment to me finishing this process. Dr. Edwin Sharpe made me see that I can take my thoughts and words to a new level that will make a more significant impact on students. Dr. Sharpe took the time to help me understand how to "think organizationally" and how my framed thoughts could create a positive collaboration between me and the education system. Dr. Andrea Kehoe always gave me a calming voice and helped me through the paperwork of the dissertation process. Also, I thank Dr. Cherie Washington

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Abstract

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs in Texas

A Phenomenological Inquiry

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DAEPs represent a form of the exclusionary discipline practices used by school districts with zero tolerance policies to remove identified students from home campuses, despite evidence showing the ineffectiveness of such policies. Educational leaders believe alternative education offers an effective method to reduce negative student behaviors in schools. DAEPs are aimed at correcting or managing the behavior of disruptive students. More concerning, students who have been processed through the court system as well as through the disciplinary processes of the school district receive assignments in higher security DAEPs known as Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP). An overview of the JJAEP phenomenon's interventions and transition support programs for students who return to the home school is needed. The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEP in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within these schools and the

transitions of students returning to their home campuses. The inquiry provided a phenomenological understanding of the characteristics of JJAEPS that were expected to offer students individualized academic and behavior supports. To conduct this study, five educational leaders who oversaw one of the 26 JJAEPs in Texas were interviewed in one-on-one format about their lived experiences with this educational phenomenon. The findings produced four themes: (a) Theme 1: JJAEP curriculum and instruction follow district guidelines; (b) Theme 2: JJAEPs focus on social-emotional interventions with students; (c) Theme 3: Minimal implementation opportunities exist to support college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) at a JJAEP; (d) Theme 4: Comprehensive transition planning is undeveloped at a JJAEP. Chapter 5 contains the discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: *alternative education, at-risk, disciplinary alternative education programs, juvenile justice alternative education programs, intervention plans, transition plans*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP) have existed for over 50 years in Texas as schools that provide alternative opportunities for completing a high school education to students either expelled or court-removed from their regular high schools. DAEPs were developed in response to school crime, student violence, and classroom disruption (Education Commission of States, 2007). These schools are designed to meet the academic needs of the students they service. Often, disruptive and violent behavior inside of traditional high schools leads to students' assignments to DAEP schools.

Many school systems or local education agencies (LEA) use disciplinary alternative education schools to remove students labeled as disruptive or dangerous. LEAs use behavior-focused alternative education schools as part of their continuum of services and tend to target students in Grades 9 through 12 for assignment to these schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). LEA leaders believe alternative education offers an effective method for reducing negative behaviors in schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Moreover, students in alternative education programs often lack emotional and behavioral skills that cause their disruptive behaviors and lead to them being labeled as at-risk for dropout. A more severe level of disciplinary alternative education is called the juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP). The JJAEP serves students with felony convictions who fall under the parameters of the criminal justice system.

This chapter introduces the features of the DAEP and JJAEP to distinguish between the two forms of alternative education. The background of alternative education

programs led to the problem and purpose of this study and to the research questions that address the study. The framework for analysis and significance of the study are presented. The chapter also contains the definitions of terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary.

Alternative Education and the Juvenile Justice System

School discipline that controls discipline behavior is enacted by suspending and expelling misbehaving students (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Many school discipline policies prioritize the punishment practice for students using a one-size-fits-all approach with predetermined guidelines, such as zero-tolerance policies, for the punishments of students who violate school rules. School policies that support holistic types of discipline conjecture that punishing disruptive students results in safer environments. Also, discipline management discourages other students from engaging in similarly disruptive behaviors. However, disruptive students find themselves labeled as delinquent and facing a downward spiral of harsher punishments that lead them into the judicial system (Rueter & Trice, 2011; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). School districts rely on alternative education settings for children and adolescents who are behaviorally disruptive and cannot succeed in district schools designed for the general education of all children (Avery, 2016; Carver & Lewis, 2010; Deed & DePaoli, 2007). Disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP) are considered nontraditional education programs that offer innovative academic classes for students within general education schools. The plans also operate as separate schools for students removed from their traditional campuses (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Alternative education occurs in facilities

separated from public education campuses governed by local education agencies (LEA) and state departments of education (Aron, 2006; Carver & Lewis, 2010; Gottfredson, 2001; McDaniel, Jolivette, & Ennis, 2014; Quinn & Poirier, 2006).

Carver and Lewis (2010) noted that most types of alternative education programs serve students with behavioral and academic deficits, or students considered at-risk due to their poor academic and social skills. Alternative education programs explicitly designed for disciplinary purposes began to proliferate during the 1990s (Cortez & Robledo Montecel, 1999). DAEPs serve students engaged in disruptive behavior or have disciplinary problems at their home campuses. In contrast to educational and therapeutic alternative settings, DAEPs aims at correcting, or managing, the act of disruptive students (Aron, 2003, 2006; Raywid, 1994, 1999). By addressing their functional needs, DAEPs are expected to promote practical approaches to behavioral decision making, academic skills, and achievement opportunities among the students they serve (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Eichorn et al., 2014). However, students enrolled in a DAEP tend to be provided with minimal levels of instruction and behavioral support. The level of curriculum provided in the DAEP is a problem because students who speak English as a second language, are from a minority background, or need special education services tend to require additional educational attention (Aron, 2003, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 2001).

The over-representation of at-risk, truant students in DAEPS becomes rampant when students lack structure and guidance for academic and social-emotional learning between the disciplinary education school and their traditional home school. The definition of an at-risk student is a student considered to have a higher probability of

failing academically or dropping out of school (Carver & Lewis, 2010). At-risk indicators include learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, "poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school" (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 1).

DAEPs represent a form of the exclusionary discipline practices used by school districts with zero-tolerance policies, which have expanded in recent years despite evidence showing the ineffectiveness of such systems (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Kennedy-Lewis, 2015; Skiba & Knesting 2011). The discipline disparities happening to students by race and gender and cause targeted students to be ostracized by their peers. When students are ostracized, they tend to engage in misbehavior in the traditional school. Misbehavior causes students to lose opportunities to receive help for gaining academic, social, and emotional skills (Irby, 2014; Kennedy-Lewis, 2015). The lack of support for at-risk and behaviorally disruptive students comes from the inconsistent application of standards and procedures for enforcing state, local, and national discipline laws. Interestingly, Steinberg and Lacoe (2017) found no connection between race, gender, and academic needs among alternative education students in a study about the practices used with students in alternative schools.

Many school systems or local education agencies (LEA) use disciplinary alternative education schools to remove students labeled as disruptive or dangerous. LEAs use behavior-focused alternative education schools as part of their continuum of services and tend to target students in Grades 9 through 12 (Carver & Lewis, 2010). LEAs also do so disproportionately for students of color and with individual education

needs (Foley & Pang, 2006). LEA leaders believe alternative education offers an effective method to reduce negative student behaviors in schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Students in alternative education programs, moreover, often lack emotional and behavioral skills, causing them to demonstrate disruptive behaviors. Instead, these students need education to promote prosocial behaviors. Critical for students who have completed their DAEP assignments is a transition plan. The transition plan is a comprehensive transitional process that includes community agencies. It provides services to these students to support success with academic, behavioral, and life skills when returning to the local, traditional school.

Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Petrosko (2014) concluded that alternative schools could offer appropriate settings for teaching social skills to disruptive students who produce behavior problems in general education classrooms. Nonetheless, an unintended level of discrimination that is rooted in institutional biases about race, poverty, and special education leads to students being disproportionately placed in alternative schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Suitts, Dunn, & Sabree, 2014). Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, and Lequia (2016) found that enrollment in an alternative education school may increase the risk of students dropping out because these students become unable to develop or retain academic and social skills. Alternative education programs lack the quality-assurance protocols, and the data collection capacity needed to manage the program with fidelity (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014).

Students are more likely to successfully acclimate from an alternative school to a traditional school upon completion of the disciplinary placement with a successful

academic and behavioral transition plan and acquisition of social and academic skills (Eichorn et al., 2014; Platt, Bohac, & Wade, 2015). Because of the misbehavior that leads to a disciplinary assignment, these disruptive students need additional guidance to be successful in reintegrating into the general education population. Evidence-based programs and practices (i.e., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], wraparound services) has proved useful in the knowledge of how to support students but have not provided the same level of guidance on how to do it effectively in an alternative school setting.

The Texas Safe Schools Act provides legislative guidance about DAEPs used to educate disruptive students. In 1995, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 1 to establish DAEPs that allowed for removing students from their traditional schools and offering them continued education even though they had violated local and state regulations and laws in their local, traditional schools and districts. DAEPs began operating in all Texas school districts, starting with the 1996-97 school year. The Texas Education Agency (2007) designated DAEP schools for students removed from their traditional, local schools for specified periods due to disciplinary actions. Texas Education Code's (2016) Chapter 37 required each school district in the state to provide an alternative education program for suspended and expelled students who needed to remain in a public school. DAEPs operate separately from traditional schools and their classrooms. In Texas, DAEPs are often located on an isolated campus away from a district's traditional schools to provide curriculum and instruction to disruptive and at-risk students and to address their behavioral needs.

JJAEPs have the mission to support students who are underachieving academically due to learning disabilities, exhibiting emotional or behavioral issues, demonstrating a high risk of dropping out of school or displaying the need for individualized instruction through response to intervention (RTI; Eichorn et al., 2014). JJAEPs enable students to perform at grade level as a result of academic interventions provided by the JJAEP in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and self-discipline. JJAEPs must maintain a ratio of at least one instructional staff member for every 24 enrolled students. Instructional staff members of Texas JJAEPs must be teachers who are highly qualified and certified by the State Board for Education Certification (SBEC), are highly qualified and who meet the teaching requirements of the organization providing education services at the JJAEP. The Texas JJAEPs do not operate in every county of the state, due to costs and geography, and the students in Texas JJAEPs are disproportionately children of color (Cortez & Cortez, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Students who are expelled and removed from the general education school setting are placed into alternative education schools to continue their education. These at-risk students typically become apathetic about school and engage in misbehavior in their schools and neighborhoods (Bondy & Ross, 2008). At-risk students' lack of academic success leads to an abundance of disruptive behaviors and disciplinary placement in DAEP settings (Avery, 2016; Carver & Lewis, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011).

Students who have been processed through the court system as well as through the disciplinary processes of the school district receive assignments in higher security

DAEPs known as Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP). Even though alternative schools using intervention plans can have a positive impact on struggling students in effectively transferring back to the home campus (Campbell, 2011; McWhorter, 2007), the bulk of research focuses on DAEP outcomes rather than JJAEP as a specific phenomenon. The intervention practices used in JJAEPs and the configurations and characteristics of these programs are not widely known (Legislative Budget Board Staff [LBBS], 2016). JJAEP educators' perspectives about the transition strategies used to prevent JJAEP students from dropping out of school or entering the school-to-prison pipeline need more considerable attention (LBBS, 2016; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEPs in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within these schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses. This phenomenological inquiry with educators leading and teaching in JJAEPs provided a unique understanding of the characteristics of a type of disciplinary alternative education system that is charged with providing individualized supports to impact students' academics and behaviors. The inquiry provided evidence of the structures and processes considered by the JJAEP educators to be necessary to reduce levels of recidivism and improve high school graduation rates of at-risk students.

The participants expressed how instructional delivery in the JJAEP affected students' grades, attendance, credits earned, behavior, as well as transitions to home campuses. Additionally, the JJAEP program characteristics that demonstrated

effectiveness in decreasing recidivism as well as increasing college and career readiness among at-risk students was revealed by participants in this research. This exploration from a phenomenological perspective provided an opportunity for exploring transition planning and implementation for students leaving JJAEPs for their local, traditional campuses. To conduct this study, educational leaders overseeing the 26 JJAEPs in Texas represented the population of interest. The researcher interviewed interested JJAEP leaders in one-on-one format about their lived experiences with this educational phenomenon. The researcher interviewed five JJAEP administrators or educational leaders.

Research Questions

To examine the lived experiences of JJAEP education leaders in Texas responsible for the instruction within these schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses, the phenomenological research design was applied. The conceptual framework for studying the phenomenon of leading a JJAEP in Texas was the state's juvenile justice and education policies. Specifically, the policies that formed the framework used for the analysis addressed monitoring and evaluating interventions for the students enrolled at a JJAEP, understanding and utilizing strategies to support college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) development with high school students, and monitoring and implementing transition systems for effective re-entry to the home school. The following three research questions guided the phenomenological study of the JJAEP:

1. What are the experiences with instructional interventions that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
2. What are the experiences with promoting college and career readiness among students that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
3. What are the transition programming experiences for students returning to their local, traditional campuses that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?

Framework for Analysis

The framework used for the researcher questions and analysis of data was based on the alternative education and juvenile justice system policies in Texas. Texas has both DAEP and JJAEP policies. Texas have specific policies related to interventions in these schools. Texas has accountability policies affecting the programs of public education in the state. Finally, specific transition policies designed to ensure students leave DAEPs and JJAEPs and return to their home schools with success affected the design and conduct of this phenomenological study.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) Policy

DAEPs represent a form of the exclusionary discipline practices used by school districts with zero-tolerance policies, which have expanded in recent years despite evidence showing the ineffectiveness of such policies (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Kennedy-Lewis, 2015; Skiba & Knesting 2011). The Texas Safe Schools Act provided legislative guidance about using DAEPs to educate disruptive students. In 1995, the Texas legislature's Senate Bill 1 was passed to establish DAEPs that allowed for removing students from their traditional schools and

offering them continued education even though they had violated local and state regulations and laws in their local, traditional schools and districts.

DAEPs began operating in all Texas school districts starting with the 1996-1997 school year. The Texas Education Agency (2007) designated DAEP schools for students removed from their traditional, local schools for specified periods due to disciplinary actions. In the Texas Education Code's (2016) Chapter 37, each school district in the state is required to provide an alternative education program for suspended and expelled students who needed to remain in a public school. DAEPs operate separately from traditional schools and their classrooms. In Texas, DAEPs are often located on an isolated campus away from a district's traditional schools to provide curriculum and instruction to at-risk students and to address their behavioral needs.

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) Policy

JJAEPs are designed to address students that have violated an offense under Texas Education Code Chapter 37 that includes mandatory, discretionary, and court-ordered expulsions from their home school. Students are assigned to a JJAEP as a result of violating a Texas Education Code Chapter 37 offense that includes: (a) mandatory expulsion from the home school for serious infractions of a school district's student code of conduct, (b) discretionary expulsion for serious infractions that occur off-campus as well as other infractions of a school district's student code of conduct, and (c) court-ordered enrollment due to Title V offenses or probation conditions. In Texas, JJAEPs do not operate in every county of the state, due to costs and geography, and the students in Texas JJAEPs are disproportionately children of color (Cortez & Cortez, 2008). Texas

uses JJAEP facilities operate in the 26 counties of Bell, Bexar, Brazoria, Brazos, Cameron, Collin, Dallas, Denton, El Paso, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Hidalgo, Jefferson, Johnson, Lubbock, McLennan, Midland, Montgomery, Nueces, Tarrant, Taylor, Travis, Webb, Wichita, and Williamson.

Students who attend JJAEPs are expected to perform at grade level as a result of academic interventions provided by the education staff in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and self-discipline (Texas Juvenile Justice Department [TJJD], 2017). The goal of a JJAEP is to reduce delinquency, increase responsibility of the negative behavior that created the expulsion for the at-risk students, and reform the students' conduct through thorough community-based juvenile probation systems that includes transitioning and counseling.

Intervention Policies Affecting DAEPs and JJAEPs

Intervention policies for students at a DAEP allows for promoting positive ways to interact with adults and peers. In order to design successful intervention in social behaviors, the focus of the problem evaluation must move from the child's family background to a functional assessment of the child's problem behavior as it occurs in the education setting. The plan must identify what caused the problem behavior as well as what positive behaviors can replace the child's problematic patterns of behavior. Tobin and Sprague (1999) noted the following instructional features as effective with students, regardless of the subject taught: "(a) combining direct instruction and strategy instruction, (b) controlling task difficulty and number of steps, (c) using small interactive groups, and (d) using directed responses and questioning of students" (p. 11). Key academic

interventions addressed for students in a disciplinary education program include small class size, one-to-one interaction between teachers and students, a supportive environment, opportunities for student success, and flexibility in structure and emphasis on student decision-making (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Texas Accountability Including College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) Indicators

The accountability system for Texas evaluates performance according to the three domains of student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps (Texas Education Agency, 2019b). The domain of student achievement refers to students' performance across all subjects on general and alternate assessments. Student achievement includes CCMR indicators and graduation rates. The domain of school progress involves measuring district and campus outcomes in the two areas of the number of students who attained least one year of academic growth to be on track as measured by core subject assessments that are required by the state. Student progress involves measuring the achievement of all students between districts or campuses that share similar economic disadvantage characteristics among their students. The domain of closing the gaps compares data disaggregated to demonstrate differentials between racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other factors. The closing the gaps domain is used to determine if gaps between students of color and White students are showing evidence of shrinking. In this study, the emphasize domain affecting the data collection will be the first domain of student achievement, specifically the development of CCMR among secondary students enrolled in the JJAEP. The CCMR component of the

accountability system includes data from ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), SAT, Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment results, On Ramps, and Level I and Level II certificates (Texas Education Agency, 2019b).

Transition Policies for Moving Students From Alternative Education to Home Schools

In 2019, House Bill 2184 amended Chapter 37 of the Education Code by adding Section 37.023 to form a state policy for ensuring students transition from DAEPs and JJAEPs to their regular schools and classrooms (Childress, 2019). The requirements apply to all publicly operated DAEPs and JJAEPs in the state of Texas. The requirements include schools operated by the TJJD, a juvenile board, or any other governmental entity.

The policy requires DAEP/JJAEP administrators to provide written notice of the date of the student's release from the DAEP/JJAEP to the student's parent or a person standing in parental relation to the student and the administrator of the campus to which the student intends to transition (Childress, 2019). DAEP/JJAEP administrators must also provide the regular or home campus administrator an assessment of the student's academic growth and the results of any assessment instruments student completed during enrollment in the DAEP/JJAEP. These records must be shared as quickly as possible once the DAEP/JJAEP administrator has the student's release date scheduled.

In addition, no later than 5 instructional days after the date of a student's release from the DAEP, the students regular or home campus administrator has to coordinate the student transitions into a regular classroom. The coordination must include assistance and recommendations from a team of professionals who may include the following as

applicable to the school district: school counselors, school district peace officers, school resource officers, licensed clinical social workers, campus behavior coordinators, classroom teachers who are or may be responsible for implementing the student's personalized transition plan, and any other school district professional (Childress, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The methods for evaluating DAEP/JJAEP academic and behavior programs need further scrutiny (Hinds, 2013). Exploratory research is necessary when little is known about a phenomenon. Creating an accurate understanding of an educational phenomenon is the only way to change or recreate it (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The nature of JJAEPs' challenges as related to ensuring individualized instruction, behavior monitoring, and transition planning successes will be known within the body of research. This study used participant experiences to understand effective active programming with students who must transition between alternative education and traditional schools. The findings of this study might lead to future collaborations between alternative education programs and traditional schools work in cohesion between both education programs.

The participants described their programs for facilitating youth re-entry into home schools. JJAEP educational leaders evaluate student intervention outcomes guided by policymakers seeking educational results (including postsecondary attainment) for students who attended JJAEPs. In particular, understanding the use of intervention plans for transitions those students returning to the traditional setting might lead to recidivism reductions within JJAEPs.

Data about how transition plans could be used to reduce students' recidivism into JJAEP following their return to their local could be useful. The lack of information about transitioning could benefit state-level educational planners and policymakers. Insight into how intervention planning and transition designs were implemented in the alternative schools and the effect they had on JJAEP students were accrued in this research.

Definition of Terms

At-risk. Students that are measured with a hi probability of showing academic failure in school and have a higher risk of dropping out of school. At-risk students are labeled based on low accountability scores, disciplinary issues, learning disabilities, school grade failures, or other possible academic factors the affect a student's educational achievement and outcomes in a school setting (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP). DAEPs are schools designed to serve students who demonstrate difficulty functioning at their home campus. In contrast to educational and therapeutic alternative settings, DAEPs are aimed at correcting or managing the behavior of disruptive students (Aron, 2003, 2006; Raywid, 1995).

Juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP). JJAEPs are designed to address students that have violated an offense under Texas Education Code Chapter 37 that includes mandatory expulsions from their home school for serious infractions in the Student Code of Conduct or discretionary expulsions for serious infractions that occur off-campus or title V offenses under the legal penal code. Students that attend JJAEP are expected to perform at grade level as a result of academic interventions provided by the

education staff in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and self-discipline (Texas Juvenile Justice Department [TJJD], 2017).

Intervention plans. NAEA (2009) described intervention plans as programs that "engage and challenge the student while addressing the academic, behavioral, transitional, and vocational needs of the participant" (p. 11). Intervention plans include arranging activities to help students become successful in their classwork, enhance their academic growth, and decrease those negative behaviors that can impact academic and social development. Intervention plans are mutually developed between the student and trusted community members to ensure the student has success in the classroom and community. The intervention plan is targeted for both an academic and social development for students in an alternative education setting (NAEA, 2009).

Recidivism. In a JJAEP or DAEP, the idea of a tendency to relapse into the behavior previously exhibited. Recidivism is addressed in criminal system behaviors.

Student achievement. Student achievement is viewed as a useful tool that measures student performance based on academic gains. Measuring student achievement means knowing the academic advances of "different students on the measures we consider important" (Gratz, 2001, "School Effectiveness," para. 2). Student achievement is benchmarked ineffective measures with a limited foundation that "denies the complexity of the human experience and ignores the clear truth that students, parents, and society want more from their schools than a narrow band of facts (Gratz, 2001, "School Purposes," para. 1).

Transition plans. Transition planning brings the student and individuals involved in academic or social development together to help the student prepare for re-entry to the traditional school. An expectation is given to the students to learn the necessary skills to make an effective transition back to the home school with minimal interruption and legal disruptions (Eichorn et al., 2014).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to including educational leaders who are district and campus administrators at JJAEPs within Texas and serving students in Grades 9 through 12. The inclusion criterion was educational leaders working at JJAEPs at the time of the interviews. Because the researcher was a principal (i.e., an administrator or educational leader) of one of the 26 JJAEPs in Texas, the exclusion criterion involved not recruiting any participants at the JJAEP, which the researcher was a principal.

Limitations

Limitations of this study prevented the findings from generalizing to other JJAEPs. For example, the 26 JJAEPs' educators were included in the target population; therefore, the experiences had by the educational leaders in the JJAEPs in Texas might not transfer to the experiences had by their peers in other states. Results were shared in an interpretive manner, and only readers could determine if the findings transferred to other educational environments.

Assumptions

The assumption was that the participants would be truthful when sharing their lived experiences and actions at a JJAEP. The participants were assumed to be familiar

with the processes used in their facilities for academic growth, dropout prevention, and college and career readiness. The participants' data were reliable.

Summary

The reasons for which students can be referred to JJAEP programs indicated to policymakers the issue of school safety and classroom disruption, yet little was known about the academic and social growth of students while enrolled in a JJAEP. This possible disconnect about the extent to which JJAEP facilities serve and transition those students back to the traditional school setting is the phenomenon that was studied. The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEPs in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within these schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses. The JJAEP program characteristics that demonstrate effectiveness in decreasing recidivism as well as increasing college and career readiness among at-risk students might be revealed through this research. This exploration from a phenomenological perspective might provide an opportunity for exploring the function of transition plan implementation for students leaving JJAEPs for their local, traditional campuses. To conduct this study, educational leaders who represented the leadership of the 26 JJAEPs in Texas were the population of interest. Five interested JJAEP educational leaders were interviewed in a one-on-one format about their lived experiences with this educational phenomenon. A review of the literature regarding DAEPs and JJAEPs is addressed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents the methods for conducting the phenomenological study. Chapters 4 and 5 contain the findings and conclusions of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This literature review presents an overview of how alternative education programs prepare students attending JJAEPs for returning to their local school districts. Re-entry to the traditional school setting can be fraught with challenges. JJAEPs have the mission to support students who are underachieving academically due to learning disabilities, exhibiting emotional or behavioral issues, demonstrating a high risk of dropping out of school, or displaying the need for individualized instruction through response to intervention (RTI; Eichorn et al., 2014).

Investigating the various alternative education programs and intervention practices used with students at-risk for dropout due to disciplinary problems or involvement in the juvenile justice system and enrolled in alternative education programs required searching within multiple databases (e.g., Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, Legal Collection, Professional Development Collection, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Google Scholar). Research and reports published from 2008 through the present were sought using the following keywords: *discipline in schools, student discipline* or *student conduct; alternative education, alternative school, alternative program,* or *alternative education programming; student transition; transition plans; educational support services; social, emotional, or developmental models; student development; behavior intervention;* and *legislation, policy,* or *court cases*. Research literature about what programs do to ensure their students can succeed in traditional, general education settings

appear in this chapter. However, the first background on DAEPs and JJAEPs in Texas is provided.

Background on Alternative Education

Disciplinary alternative education programs have existed for over 50 years in Texas as schools that provide alternative opportunities for completing a high school education to students either expelled or court-removed from their regular high schools. DAEPs were developed in response to school crime, student violence, and classroom disruption (Education Commission of States, 2007). In the 1970s, school districts across the United States began to establish alternative education programs and schools for student populations considered to be at risk of school failure or dropping out (Texas Education Agency, n.d., 2007). These schools are designed to meet the academic needs of the at-risk students they service. Often, disruptive and violent behavior inside of traditional high schools leads to students' assignments to DAEP schools. Sor severe cases, JJAEPs serve the students with felony convictions and falling under the parameters of the criminal justice system.

Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 1 in the mid-1990s to establish a structure for disciplinary and judicially mandated alternative education. The bill allowed for removing students whose behaviors violated local schools' codes of conduct or state laws and for ensuring they continued their high school education. The Texas legislation instructed all districts to provide alternative education setting access to students removed from regular education settings, mainly when such removals occurred under zero-tolerance discipline

policies that most school districts had adopted. Texas school districts created and implemented DAEPs, beginning with the 1996-1997 school year.

Texas mandated that school districts provide DAEP and JJAEP programs under the Texas Education Code Chapter 37 for students violating severe infractions in their student codes of conduct that leads to expulsion from their local high school. Chapter 37 required each school district in the state to provide a DAEP to which students could be placed for specified conduct. Chapter 37 also provided requirements for educating students at JJAEPs charged with a felony because that legal charge causes their mandatory expulsion from public school (see Chapter 37, Section 37.011).

While DAEPs are school district operated, JJAEPs fall under the Texas Juvenile Justice Department's authority per Texas Administrative Code 348. JJAEPs operate in counties with populations higher than 125,000 (TAC, 2018). JJAEPs serve students with an opportunity to maintain their academic development and ensure they return to their regular schools with adequate educational growth. Each facility operates under the instructional model of 7-hour instructional days, with students enrolling for 90 to 180 days based on their infractions (Texas Education Agency, 2009). JJAEPs provide instruction in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and behavioral self-discipline. Students earn credits that transfer into their regular schools and districts. Students in Grades 9 through 12 are expected to receive the same academic services as they received at their regular high school and to maintain progress toward promotion and graduation. Students of JJAEPs are expected to produce at least a half school year of academic growth during their enrollment.

Therefore, DAEPs and JJAEPs operate separately from regular school campuses. Educators working in DAEPs and JJAEPs provide for the educational and behavioral needs of students assigned to the programs. In 2007, the Texas Education Agency required JJAEPs and DAEPs to offer an innovative curriculum, including practices that are "self-paced, individualized, challenging and appealing to student interest" (p. 7), for the instruction for enrolled students. DAEP and JJAEP educators were expected to create a safe and positive environment and to guide students to make appropriate choices about their behaviors and academics. The 2007 requirement suggested an evolution of the alternative education program model occurred.

Disciplinary and Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs Today

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) generated the requirements to improve access to a quality education for youth involved in and returning from a juvenile justice program. ESSA contained language directed at prevention and intervention programs for youth who are at-risk and academically underperforming. ESSA reinforced access to education upon re-entry for students who had been assigned to juvenile justice alternative education programs by requiring education planning, credit transfer, and timely re-enrollment in appropriate educational placements. The interventions considered useful in traditional and alternative education programs include specific instructional strategies (e.g., response to intervention [RTI]), clear discipline goals, useful program evaluations, and behavioral interventions (e.g., PBIS; Hanover Research, 2013; Horner, Sugai, & Vincent, 2005; Jolivette, Swoszowski, & Ennis, 2013; Lewis, 2005). Rennie Center Education Research and Policy (2014) discussed effective

interventions that indicate that strategies should have "clearly identified goals with high expectations for social, emotional, behavioral and academic growth" (p. 4).

U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (2014) jointly recommended several principles for providing a high-quality education to the student attending juvenile justice education programs. The goal was to create minimum standards that all states must meet. NJJN (2016) elaborated on this principals as follows: (a) maintaining a well-managed climate facility-wide that prioritizes education, (b) recruiting qualified educators with effective pedagogical skills for teaching at-risk students, (c) instituting appropriate procedures for directing education systems that include re-entry plans, (d) offering opportunities for student growth and development, and (e) providing GED or college and career preparations as needed.

Seigle et al. (2014) suggested aligning correctional educational programs with state standards for public schools and local graduation requirements to improve educational quality. Gregory and Fergus (2017) promoted aligning the causes of discipline inequalities and interventions used. However, under the federal plan, there is no leniency or acknowledgment of the unique challenges facing students with disabilities or mental health issues locked in detention facilities or the educators trying to help them (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014).

Eichorn et al. (2014) discussed the importance of the interventions being observable and overtly present in nontraditional and alternative schools. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) noted the characteristics of successful DAEPs include offering multi-tiered systems of positive support and PBIS as part of the behavioral overview and management

approaches. Positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) is a known effective intervention that will be discussed later in the review. Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) shared that an adequate DAEP operates with a low student-teacher ratio, a highly structured classroom with behavioral classroom management, school-based adult mentors, behavioral assessments, social skills instruction, effective academic instruction, and parent involvement. These characteristics in a DAEP enable the likelihood of successful student transition and re-entry to the traditional school settings (Flower et al., 2011).

However, investing additional resources in alternative disciplinary approaches (e.g., PBIS) can challenge many school districts due to a lack of funds. The minimal resources can lead to schools unconsciously creating disciplinary environments in which low performing students are not prepared for re-entry back to the traditional setting. Villalobos and Bohannan (2017) discussed how at-risk students who are suspended or expelled often become more likely to fall behind in their coursework, disengage academically, and drop out of school, and become less likely to become successful in the traditional setting. Further, "academic disengagement and school dropout are strong indicators of eventual involvement with the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems" (Villalobos & Bohannan, 2017, p. 4). Morgan et al. (2014) suggested that strong protective factors be offered as additional resources for at-risk students in DAEPs that include effective "student support team efforts" (p. 108); legal, behavioral, and community support; and positive school engagement and connectedness to prevent recidivism and academic loss.

Successful student transition and re-entry into the traditional school setting represent positive DAEP student outcomes for at-risk students. The following sections detail the practices regarded as influencing successful DAEP outcomes. The methods highlighted include effective intervention strategies, individualized instruction, and re-entry or transition interventions for these at-risk students.

Overview of Effective Intervention Strategies

Jolivette, McDaniel, Sprague, Swain-Bradway, and Parks Ennis (2012) conducted a review of PBIS practices in DAEPs and concluded that the PBIS intervention strategies add value to DAEP student outcomes. Jolivette et al. found that behavioral improvement, student motivation, improved grades, and student motivation are critical students' successful re-entry to traditional schools when effectively implemented. Swanson (2013) performed a study on the extent of students in an alternative school, recognizing the behaviors that caused them to be in a disciplinary setting. Swanson summarized how interventions offer students the opportunity to understand their responsibility for the behavior that led to them being placed in a DAEP to reduce recidivism in DAEPs. However, students with disabilities and English language learners receive minimal levels of academic support even in the context of states' expectations (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

In an analysis of practices used in DAEPs in Massachusetts, Rennie Center (2014) determined that collaboration between various agencies, such as mental health agencies, social service agencies, and juvenile justice services, offers a comprehensive level of interventions and strategies that benefit students. Rennie Center called for improving and leveraging systemwide reforms not only in Massachusetts but also in other states.

Samuels (2016) provided a multi-state evaluation of systemic interventions that included positive behavioral, multi-tiered, and RTI supports. Samuels encouraged DAEPs to use multi-tiered supports to enable educators to address students' academic and behavioral issues at the same time. The multi-tiered system can be used to address educational and behavior needs through "improving instruction and academic results for all students" (Samuels, 2016, para. 6).

Utley and Obiakor (2012) sought to provide useful models that are evidence-based to support academic and behavioral issues with at-risk students. Utley and Obiakor noted that comprehensive RTI and PBIS models should take on an "interdisciplinary approach" (p. 59), and the models should not be implemented in a "piecemeal fashion" (p. 59). Additional interventions that Utley and Obiakor recommended were "evidence-based practices, behavioral support, targeted social skills and wraparound services" (p. 49). Utley and Obiakor concluded that RTI and PBIS procedures should be "valid and implemented with fidelity" (p. 59), which requires strategic planning by school districts and DAEPs.

Coleman (2002) studied the "benefits of small school structures, low student-teacher ratios, and good relationships between students and teachers" (p. 220) and its value to a disciplinary alternative education program. Coleman noted that DAEP students "benefit from close teacher-student relationships" (p. 221). Coleman discussed how communication between teachers and students opens channels of communication for building rapport and trust among students and improving students' emotional well-being

because students tend to return to their local, traditional schools being "behind in all their classes" (p. 227) and need emotional understanding.

Morgan et al. (2014) supported Coleman's conclusions in a report on literature and research about improving learning conditions for at-risk students. The reports reviewed included 11 separate states and agencies that included education and law enforcement. Based on the data from states that included Virginia, New York, Arizona, and Washington, Morgan, et al. supported using effective interventions that promote students to connect and engage with educators in DAEPs. Morgan et al. noted there is a need for "shared expectations for students' and adults' behavior" (p. 50) and appropriate "academic supports and interesting, hands-on instruction that is tailored to diverse learning styles" (p. 57). Morgan et al. noted DAEPs were charged with meeting "the greatest needs and opportunities for improving students' academic, social, and emotional growth while reducing youths' involvement in the juvenile justice system" (p. 366).

Parental involvement. Actively including and involving parents enables parents and educators to partner in providing at-risk students with purposeful support (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Foley and Pang (2006) addressed parental involvement as an effective characteristic in DAEPs, even though DAEPs need to develop "innovative strategies to involve parents" (p. 17). Foley and Pang examined the aspects of alternative education and the implications of student engagement in DAEPs and concluded that DAEP educators have limited awareness about what resources may be used to support at-risk students most effectively. Eichorn et al. (2014) called on DAEPs to promote parental involvement, "actively involve parents/guardians beyond parent/guardian-teacher

meetings" (p. 11), and to incorporate parents as respected members of the intervention team.

Behavior monitoring and reinforcement. Texas Education Agency (2007) conducted a policy evaluation of best practices that could be considered successful in a disciplinary alternative education setting. The Texas Education Agency determined best practices to include discipline management, curriculum and instruction strategies, teacher and staff development, counseling and support services, and student transition planning. Discipline management included using a monitoring system to reinforce rules and promote positive student behaviors. Using a monitoring system (e.g., point system) offers opportunities for teachers to help students achieve their personal and instructional goals and to support students' needs for maximizing their learning styles and academic practices (Deed & DePaoli, 2007; Eichorn et al., 2014; NAEA, 2018). The use of a monitoring system in a DAEP enables educators to reinforce behaviors effectively with consequences being applied appropriately for students on academic and behavioral performance (Deed & DePaoli, 2007).

A school-based adult mentor develops a connection with the student by listening, problem-solving, and reinforcing appropriate behavior (Flower et al., 2011, p. 492). Gruhn (2017) noted that it was important to have adult mentors for students in DAEPs. Mentors provide a behavior monitoring and support system during a student's placement time that adds value in improving grades, gaining credits toward graduation, assisting with problem-solving, supporting the development of social-emotional capacity, and

encouraging a successful transition when returning to the local, traditional school (Gruhn, 2017; Wilkerson, Afacan, & Yan, 2015).

Behavioral skill training. Most students in DAEP have had behavioral and discipline problems while attending their local, traditional schools. Therefore, behavioral supports are necessary within a DAEP to enable students to succeed in academics and with their behaviors. Coles et al. (2009) promoted behavioral skill development strategies as crucial not only for the students to support their behavioral and instructional outcomes but also for the schools in dealing with challenging behaviors.

Flower et al. (2011) reviewed literature about the behavioral interventions being implemented in alternative education settings. Flower et al. found researchers to recommend implementing high-quality instruction, clear expectations, and structures for students to learn self-managing behaviors. Gregory and Fergus (2017) studied a relationship between academic expectations, rule enforcement, school support, and disciplinary outcomes. They supported teaching behavioral skills to enable students to achieve high academic expectations, high consistency in rule-following, and a high sense of care and community.

Flower et al. (2011) added that "learned social skills that include managing classroom behavior (e.g., following directions, asking a question); making friends; conflict resolution; anger management and alternatives to anger; and vocational skills" (p. 492). Social skills instruction can be used to restore performance discrepancies for students with behavior problems. Social skills instruction carries as much value as academic instruction in intervention support and practice. Appropriate social skills

training add value to student development in returning to a traditional environment (Coles et al., 2009; Flower et al., 2011). Consequently, Benson (2014) provided behavioral guidelines for students, teachers, and administrators in traditional or alternative settings. Benson recommended maximizing student-teacher connections, establishing open communication, building in positive support systems, and individualizing practices as effective strategies.

The use of positive support systems can generate well-rounded intervention plans for helping students returning to their traditional school settings (Deed & DePaoli, 2007; Flower et al., 2011). Hanover Research (2013) recommended using multiple interventions that include peer-assisted learning strategies, class-wide peer tutoring, and self-management interventions to be effective in increasing student engagement. Hanover Research indicated these systems align with the recommendation of other researchers regarding the value of positive support systems that also include PBIS.

Positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS). The purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity in schools and other agencies to promote productive academic and behavior practices with at-risk students (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2019). Simonsen and Sugai (2013) studied empirical and practical information on positive support systems, especially the PBIS framework. They analyzed schools' implementation of PBIS and concluded: "schools that are effective in their implementation have more than 80% of their students and staff who can indicate the desired positive behavioral expectations for a given school setting" (p. 3). Simonsen and Sugai determined that aligning behavior management and

coordinating practices of the PBIS framework "can create greater continuity and a natural progression of supports for youth to increase their chances for success further" (p. 169).

Meanwhile, Johnson et al. (2013) studied the impact of PBIS on students' behavior when used school-wide over one school year. Johnson et al. concluded that PBIS is "a viable approach for improving school behavior" (p. 141) and yields improved behaviors that directly relate to students' academic performance. Conversely, Sugai and Simonsen (2012) performed an analysis of the misconceptions of PBIS and explained the characteristics of PBIS. Sugai and Simonsen said the first misconception of PBIS regarded whether it was a framework or a practice. Sugai and Simonsen noted that PBIS is a framework that provides the following: A means of selecting, organizing, and implementing these evidence-practices by giving equal attention to (a) clearly defined and meaningful student outcomes, (b) data-driven decision making and problem-solving processes, and (c) systems that prepare and support implementers to use these practices with high fidelity and durability. ("Common Misconceptions about PBIS," para. 1)

Sprague and Horner (2007) and Sugai and Simonsen (2012) promoted the sustainability of PBIS as a framework for developing positive behaviors and implementing social supports. Sprague and Horner studied the antisocial behaviors and practices used in schools and sought to identify the appropriate behaviors needed in schools. Sprague and Horner determined that changes in students' behavior led to improvements in their academic outcomes. Sugai and Simonsen further elaborated that the PBIS framework can be used for reducing misbehaviors through "continuous progress monitoring, team-based decision-making rules and procedures, explicit monitoring of

implementation fidelity, and local content expertise and fluency" (p. 3). An interesting discrepancy between the researchers studying PBIS was their choice of verbiage between framework and practice. RTI, however, has no such conflicts of language.

Response to intervention (RTI). Samuels (2016) examined "educational frameworks aimed at systematically supporting struggling students" (para. 3) and determined that RTI is an instructional framework for addressing "problems early with students who show signs of academic weakness" (para. 2). RTI characteristics include "high-quality education, comprehensive screening of students, purposeful research-based strategies intended to help students improve in a specific problem area, progress monitoring, and decision-making based on progress data" (para. 2). Hanover Research (2013) provided an understanding of how most states use RTI. It emphasized that "interventions employed in an RTI framework are meant to function as supplements to high-quality, research-based core academic instruction" (p. 13).

Samuels (2016) promoted RTI as having primary value for supporting early reading. However, Samuels also realized that districts use a multi-tiered RTI approach to "focus on screening all children, improving overall instruction, and making decisions based on data" (para. 6). The RTI tiers may be applied based on the academic deficits and instructional needs of the students. Tier I include the standard instruction delivered to every student in a school. Tier II refers to providing additional academic support and tutoring to students, usually to small groups of students. Tier III involves providing one-on-one academic support with students who have severe deficits or persistent needs. RTI

enables students to move between tiers away and toward receiving personalized support as students gain skills or need to develop skills (Samuels, 2016).

Mostly, Hanover Research (2013) lent credibility to Tier I of classroom instruction. Hanover Research supported differentiation and individualized learning as most effective when meeting students varied instructional styles. Therefore, students in DAEPs can benefit from the tiered instruction, probably Tier II and III, to improve their academic abilities before returning to their local, traditional schools (The Editors, 2016). With RTI in place, individualized instruction in DAEPs can be strengthened.

Individualized Instruction

Texas Education Agency (2007) regarded individualized instructional plans and assessments as necessary for students transitioning between DAEP and their local, traditional schools. Texas Education Agency expects educators to ensure students' academic achievement remains the same regardless of the type of school and its location. Individualized instruction and assessments may include portfolios and project-based learning to demonstrate students' academic performance. Rennie Center (2014) encouraged using individualized instruction due to its capability to "adjust to the student's need" (p. 6) and promote autonomy in student learning.

Flower et al. (2011) promoted the productive characteristics of individualized instruction as executing small classroom sizes, supportive environments, and considerate teachers. Students learn better through innovative practices that are generated by the staff and students collectively (Flower et al., 2011). Competency-based education provides flexibility to students who are not learning at grade level and to students who could work

above grade level independently. According to Flower et al. (2011), a lower student-teacher ratio, such as in a DAEP, corresponds to higher levels of student engagement in a school setting by having a highly structured classroom environment with purposeful goals. The DAEP teacher employs individual and small group instruction with many opportunities for students to practice new academic skills (Flower et al., 2011, p. 492).

Tomlinson (2014) provided a case study in which personalized attention happened when the student-teacher ratio was low. The low student-teacher ratio gives teachers the autonomy to work with curriculum requirements and students' needs. Teachers' individualized instruction with students should be flexible and include engaging curriculum that can be modified to meet the needs of students who must master the content. Personalized attention is given when a student-teacher ratio is low. Quality approaches include teacher-directed instruction, self-paced and hands-on curriculum, and group-based instruction. According to Flower et al. (2011), students in alternative settings need this type of effective academic education to confirm that students catch up or keep up with their same-grade peers in a typical school setting.

Texas Education Agency (2007) concludes a strong emphasis on individualized instruction as a primary instructional practice to address varied learning styles with students. In fostering the different strategies shared, an expectation in that student transition will be guided in a positive setting to reduce recidivism in alternative education programs. Interventions that include multi-tiered supports offer further discussion in making wise choices and gaining a quality emotional understanding. These can be applied when developing transition plans for a student leaving their DAEP schools.

Transition Interventions and Planning

Transition processes for DAEP students include pre-entry through post-exit of the DAEP. These transition processes include providing an orientation, assessing the student and including an individualized education plan review, sharing the students' records and progress, engaging in short and long-term goal setting, developing an individualized student learner plan, and promoting other student-specific processes that can enable the student's success to the traditional environment. Quality indicators for effective transition planning are noted in NAEA that provides clear guidelines for students in returning to a traditional school setting (Eichorn et al., 2014). An effective transition framework includes collaborative decision-making teams, identification of appropriate instructional goals and learning expectations, and providing students with growth opportunities during re-entry (Coles et al., 2009). Transition plans are included as necessary in the Texas Education Code § 37.008 (a-1) (5). The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN, 2016) suggested a need for reform in juvenile justice facilities and re-entry processes for students to develop within disciplinary education settings. Therefore, Eichorn et al. (2014) suggested several quality indicators they considered to be exemplary for transition planning and support.

The quality indicators include using screening procedures to develop a clear and compelling area of improvement for the student and enable "the nontraditional or alternative school [to be] the most appropriate placement based on the student's effective and affective needs, academic requirements and post-baccalaureate goals" (Eichorn et al., 2014, p. 10). Additionally, a quality transition plan involves collaboration by the student,

parents, school officials, and outside agencies, as needed, to meet the student's needs. Eichorn et al. challenged educational leaders to communicate with all stakeholders and implement purposeful plans based on data reviews of performance to ensure the validity of students' progress and outcomes. Kennedy, Acosta, and Soutullo (2019) provided students' narratives calling for respect and assistance with positive behaviors that would aid in their transitions from DAEPs to local schools.

The Texas Legislative Budget Board Staff (LBBS, 2016) produced an issue brie containing concerns about the effectiveness of DAEP transition plans. The LBBS addressed transitions from DAEPs to traditional and the critical success of student re-entry. The brief shared data from 2012-2103, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015, which included an alarming statistic of a recidivism rate of 19%, meaning that 19% of students who completed a placement for disruptive behavior and transitioned into their traditional schools returned to DAEPs.

The LBBS (2016) recommended school districts have used a transition facilitator to help DAEP-completed students integrate into their traditional schools because the LBBS found that districts lack support systems that can be used for follow-up with DAEP-completed students. Both the national and state-level leaders recognize the value of transition plans in a disciplinary alternative education setting (Eichorn et al., 2014; LBBS, 2016). The LBBS recognized North Carolina and Tennessee as utilizing effective transition plans for students leaving DAEPs but concluded Texas still has work to do in this area.

In reporting on a case study about transitioning between a traditional campus and alternative education setting, Buchanan, Ruppert, and Cariveau (2016) discussed support for at-risk students and their families as needing engagement, opportunities for skill development and practice, and promoting skill maintenance. Buchanan et al. identified prosocial behaviors, problem-solving skills, and individualized supports to facilitate a successful transition back to the traditional school setting. Buchanan et al. concluded that building positive relationships and strong collaborations early in the DAEP experience that involves "key stakeholders is critical" (p. 14). Based on Buchanan et al. 's finding, there is value in the understanding that interventions that support the student from DAEP entry to re-entry of the traditional school setting must be on-going, individualized, and positive.

According to the NAEA (2009), effective DAEP programs operate by presenting students with clear criteria and procedures within the alternative education setting. Additionally, DAEPs provide transition services that enable students to return to their home schools. Community agencies can provide support services that allow DAEP students to engage in successful transitions when returning to their home campuses. Finally, effective DAEPs have trained personnel who are purposeful about the strategies they use to meet each student's specific academic, behavioral, and transitional needs (NAEA, 2009).

Challenges Affecting Alternative Education Programming

Juvenile and educational systems frequently work at cross purposes (Wald & Losen, 2003). Lack of coordination between educational and juvenile justice systems

produces higher risks for harming vulnerable and already at-risk students and simultaneously exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline that formed from zero-tolerance policy enforcement and disciplining minority students with disproportionate harshness (Cheek & Bucchio, 2017; LBBS, 2016). O'Hear (2007) noted that threats and punitive measures alone cannot reduce recidivism and that humanizing the conditions of alternative educational programming requires thoughtful collaborations and long-term goals.

For example, the academic achievement levels of adolescents who have been adjudicated and delinquent are rarely greater than elementary school levels (Leone & Weinberg, 2010; Suitts et al., 2014). Disciplinary alternative education programs contain the highest disability enrollment levels than traditional schools (Rueter & Trice, 2011). Among students with disabilities, the percentage of disruptive students is higher than in the same group in the general education population of students (Morris & Morris, 2006; Rueter & Trice, 2011). Additionally, as many as 70% of youth in the justice system have learning disabilities and mental health problems that go unaddressed within DAEPs and JJAEPs, even though supportive services are critical for ensuring students have long-term success following re-entry in their home schools (Morris & Morris, 2006; Müller, 2011; Zimmerman, Hendrix, Moeser, & Roush, 2004). These high population percentages for alternative education schools filled with disciplinary placements lead to unintended disparities for students of color and with disabilities. Unfortunately, students in a DAEP and JJAEP typically suffer from learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and mental illnesses (Rueter & Trice, 2011).

Once entrenched in the juvenile justice system, students enrolled in a JJAEP miss multiple days of school to make court appearances, even if their cases are ultimately dismissed, and they continue within their home high schools (Leone & Weinberg, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). These concerns require increased efforts of academic interventions for JJAEP students. JJAEPs release students into their home schools throughout the year without providing the students' services for transition or re-entry that increase the difficulties faced by already overburdened schools that must absorb these students (Cate, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). The educational services offered by the juvenile justice system generally take place outside of the school system (Cate, 2014). On the education side, schools often refuse to accept students who are court-involved, leaving them without educational services for months at a time and increasing the likelihood that they will have additional interactions with law enforcement officials. While there is evidence of re-entry programs emerging, (New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department, 2019) argues schools rarely offer adequate transition or re-entry counseling programs for students returning from residential settings, thus increasing the likelihood of further failure for these students (Gruhn, 2016; McWhorter, 2007). The proliferating use of suspensions for non-violent school misbehaviors has shown to result in students having parole or probation revoked for trivial offenses, such as truancy, tardiness, or talking out of turn (Cheek & Bucchio, 2017).

O'Hear (2007) identified three critical gaps in JJAEP reform efforts for successfully reentering students into their local, traditional schools. They involve gaps in knowledge, funding, and ethics. Too few rigorous, empirical studies have been produced

about effectiveness at rehabilitation and education as part of the knowledge gap. The funding for ensuring adequate education and support of students in JJAEPs has been sorely lacking. Lawmakers recognize the importance of providing services and support for youth when reentering a school district from an alternative school setting. Still, they do not follow through by passing legislation, suggesting they fail to adhere to the ethics of public safety (O'Hear, 2007). Safeguarding the community is an ethical issue of public safety. Politicians appear to believe they fulfill their moral obligations by funding police departments, prosecutors, and prisons rather than programs that ensure students in the juvenile justice system can grow into self-sufficient, employed adults (O'Hear, 2007). Ethically speaking, promoting positive student development for at-risk youth is an essential factor for JJAEP and DAEP reform efforts (Mulvey, 2011).

Meanwhile, many excellent alternative schools offer students who have dropped out or been expelled from school a second chance to succeed (Wald & Losen, 2003). Evaluations about the quality of services offered at some disciplinary alternative education schools are troubling. The point suggests that many do not provide the curriculum that students need to graduate and gain acceptance into higher education, nor do they offer the supports that vulnerable students may need to get back on track academically (Wald & Losen, 2003). The vast differences in quality that exist among alternative programs, as well as the methods used by school systems to place students into these alternative programs, need to be more thoroughly studied (Campbell, 2011). In particular, the racial disproportionality within the population sent to alternative schools is a source of great concern when working toward reducing recidivism and increasing high

school graduation rates among the population of students affected by JJAEPs (Suitts et al., 2014).

College, Career and Military Readiness in Alternative Education Programs

Re-entry planning that ensures students can become college and career ready should begin immediately upon a student's enrollment to an alternative education setting. By planning for re-entry, educators can outline how the student will continue, potentially through preplanned aftercare, with his or her academic career and enable the student to gain career and postsecondary readiness (Just Children Legal Aid Justice Center, 2004; NJJN, 2016; U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). Seigle, Walsh, and Weber (2011) recommended transition coordinators to work across juvenile justice and education systems to facilitate a youth's timely re-enrollment with readiness into the home school or district. The coordinator, in conjunction with the support system from the alternative education program, can ensure that the student returns with appropriate educational placement in the least restrictive environment based on consideration for the individual youth rather than on mere policy that might suggest using automatic placement in alternative programs for returning youth (New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department, 2019; Walsh et al., 2016; Warren County Educational Service Center, 2019).

Re-entry planning includes community cooperation, youth and family involvement, prompt academic records transfer that involves timelines for transfer of records between schools and alternative settings (Müller, 2011; Roy-Stevens, 2004; Seigle et al., 2011). As of 2013, 16 states (Texas was not in this list) housed local

reengagement networks comprised of communities, agencies, and individuals offering services to disconnected-from-high-school youth that include individual academic assessments, opportunities for exploring different educational options, referrals to appropriate programs, and opportunities to enroll in postsecondary education (National League of Cities, 2013). JJIE (2019) addressed aftercare as a requisite for safe and successful re-entry to traditional schools. This type of service should continue for the youth beyond JJAEP discharge to promote academic and social development and to lead to employment opportunities (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2005). When aftercare is active, students experience fewer deficits in education, job preparation, and college and career preparation.

Seigle et al. (2014) recommended that juvenile justice systems use assessments to improve the interventions selected for youth with a low risk for re-offending and to focus the most restrictive and intensive systemic interventions on youth most likely to re-offend. At the same time, the objective assessment of the youth's dynamic risk factors offers a way for juvenile justice systems to identify and focus on the primary causes of each youth's delinquent behavior. Juvenile justice systems that apply interventions based on academic assessment results and mental health and substance use diagnoses as the primary evidence for developing case plans that are matched with appropriate services for youth in their care engage in best practices.

Suitts et al. (2014) offered many strategies for students to attain academic success in an alternative school setting. They noted that having quality educators who promote academic growth is doubly essential in a JJAEP over a traditional public school.

Domenici and Forman (2011) reported on their successes in the Maya Angelou Academy in the District of Columbia with practical strategies that enabled at-risk students to gain educational and social development. and Forman's effective strategies included: (a) hiring talented teachers with high energy and expectations; (b) building a school culture of trust; (c) developing a structured curriculum that is delivered through differing, individualized instruction; (d) weaving special education services into all parts of the school; and (e) spending time and effort on preparing students to transition into self-sustaining learners.

Problematically, the juvenile justice system can only have a limited impact on youth outcomes because it needs outside agencies and actors to facilitate greater reaching and positive results for students enrolled in its education programs (Seigle et al., 2014). Most youths in the juvenile justice system are already involved in other service systems alongside their families that often have significant mental health, substance use, child welfare, and educational risk factors that can lead to or exacerbate delinquent behavior when left unaddressed. Policymakers can improve the service access, speed, and quality of system resources by ensuring the juvenile justice system collaborates with other service systems, such as local school districts, to address youths' needs in a coordinated fashion and in ways proven by research to be effective (Campbell, 2011).

Finally, as juvenile justice systems seek to put all of the recommended policy and practice reforms and improvements into place, they must address systemic equity challenges and perceptions of disproportional procedural fairness (Seigle et al., 2014). The persistent and substantial inequity of juvenile justice system decisions undermines

the broader legitimacy and effectiveness of juvenile justice legal processes and system interventions. Youth are keenly aware of treatment toward them as applied fairly, necessitating reductions in systemic applications of bias and disparate treatment to ensure that all youth have equal opportunity to transition into regular school settings successfully. Consequently, Seigle et al. (2014) recommended arming juvenile justice agency leaders, judges and other court personnel, and front-line staff with the tools, resources, and support necessary for uniting with external partners and the community to reduce re-offense rates by students who had been in JJAEPs, protect the safety of the public safety, and to ensure former JJAEP students can emerge as adults who are law-abiding career and college ready.

The best-practices JJAEP environment offers opportunities for academic learning, career exposure, and prosocial skill acquisition, all of which promote successful re-entry (National Research Council, 2013). When a value-added system is in place, the likelihood of student re-offending decreases. This environment can support youth in continuing their education beyond high school or acquiring vocational skills as well as provide mental health and substance abuse treatment (Mulvey, 2011). The developmentally oriented environment helps reduce recidivism when community-based partnerships lead to re-entry aftercare for incarcerated youth that enables youth to gain employment and any requisite credentials required for the careers they want to work in (Mulvey, 2011; Pennsylvania Juvenile Indigent Defense Action Network, 2015).

Discussion of the Literature

This literature review presented an overview of how alternative education programs prepare students attending DAEPs within the juvenile justice system for returning to their local school districts. The JJAEP education environment is a crucial aspect of re-entry reform as many students enrolled in JJAEPs report with significant academic deficits that hinder their development (Morris & Morris, 2006; Müller, 2011; Zimmerman et al., 2004). The literature contained the evidence-based supports and intervention plans for students in a disciplinary alternative education setting that are necessary to reduce levels of recidivism for at-risk students.

The literature demonstrated the characteristics of effective DAEPs and JJAEPs as offering individualized academic, behavior, and career supports. The successful DAEP needs to have high expectations, standards, and outcomes for students (Dominici & Forman, 2011; Rennie Center Education Research and Policy, 2014). Behavior supports appeared as a significant thread regarding transitioning with their newly learned prosocial behaviors as part of re-entry into their local, traditional schools. Prosocial behavior skills and self-monitoring were reported as needed for successfully transitioning DAEP students to their local, traditional schools (Gresham, Cook, Crews, & Kern, 2004). However, most local and state programs have not been designed, equipped, or operated to ensure college and career readiness among JJAEP students (National Research Council, 2013).

The gap found in the review of literature involved a dearth of study, including the educators employed in JJAEPs. Educators are charged with delivering curriculum to

JJAEP students. When transition or re-entry plans are designed, how educators fulfill their role of facilitating students' successful returns to their local, traditional schools needs understanding to promote reforms that prevent recidivism with at-risk JJAEP students. Well-designed alternative education programs can benefit at-risk students by ensuring they gain academic and behavior preparation through individualized interventions leading to high expectations and standards for the DAEP students to follow (Dominici & Forman, 2011). Further research within the JJAEP setting with educators is needed to determine the extent to which transition programs are established and promoted by JJAEP educators.

Conclusion and Summary

Background and perspective of disciplinary alternative education including Texas mandates were studied to give an overview of an alternative education program. Literature review offered indicators and summaries of effective monitoring plans for academic and behavioral intervention and transitions for at-risk students enrolled in a disciplinary alternative education program. Main indicators addressed included parental involvement, behavioral monitoring, PBIS, RTI and individualized instruction. Studies on transition planning followed some of the same statistics as interventions that also included counseling services and adult mentorship in returning students to their home school. The study gleaned on college and career readiness in an alternative education program with minimal recommendations for at-risk students.

The reviewed literature suggested the need for a phenomenological perspective from the leaders of an alternative program, especially a JJAEP in their lived experiences

in addressing interventions, college, career and military readiness and transition planning. The literature called for a study of the personnel working in the trenches at a JJAEP to give perspective of support for the at-risk students enrolled. Chapter 3 will give the methods for conducting the phenomenological study and Chapters 4 and 5 contain the findings and conclusions of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEP in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within these schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses. The participants discussed instructional delivery and students' grades, attendance, credits earned, behavior, and their return to their home campuses from JJAEP schools. Additionally, the JJAEP program characteristics that demonstrate effectiveness in decreasing recidivism as well as increasing college and career readiness among at-risk students were revealed through this research. This exploration from a phenomenological perspective provided an opportunity for exploring the function of transition plan implementation for students leaving JJAEPs for their local, traditional campuses.

Research Design

The research design was phenomenology because of the study's purpose to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEP in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders. The research design assisted in understanding the JJAEP phenomenon on interventions and transition support programs for students who return to the home school. The exploratory nature of the inquiry about a single phenomenon generated new knowledge about this type of educational programming in Texas. The design followed an interpretative form that "enables the landscape to appear" (p. 29). In other words, the participants provided data, and the findings were described through the lens of the participants as their thoughts and ideas.

This form of research used an intentional experience related to the disciplinary alternative education school, especially JJAEP, phenomenon. Phenomenology is used to understand human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas described phenomenology as an opportunity for openness and imagination by participants. The phenomenological design is focused on people's meanings of a shared lived experience; in this case, the phenomenon involves teaching students within the JJAEP. This design incorporates a logical approach to qualitative research by seeking to understand human experience within a specific phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

The exclusionary practices used for assigning students to a JJAEP affects educators who have their views on instruction and pedagogy as they engage in lived experiences while teaching at-risk, disruptive students. Like this, the interviews allowed for addressing each participant's opinions about disciplinary practices in education and what they considered effective methods. The research design was used to develop an understanding of the disparities within the JJAEP that affect educators and JJAEP students. The participants provided their views based on their lived experiences of quality systems for students in a disciplinary education program. The interview data were used to answer three research questions.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the phenomenological inquiry:

1. What are the experiences with instructional interventions that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?

2. What are the experiences with promoting college and career readiness among students that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
3. What are the transition programming experiences for students returning to their local, traditional campuses that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?

Site Selection

To conduct this study, educational leaders who oversaw the 26 JJAEPs in Texas represented the population of interest. The inclusion criterion required the educator leaders to be working at JJAEPs at the time of the interviews. Because the researcher was a principal of one of the 26 JJAEPs in Texas, the exclusion criterion involved not recruiting any participants from the JJAEP at which the researcher was a principal. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to enrich the data. The researcher interviewed five administrators who represented educational leadership positions at the other 25 JJAEPs in Texas.

Participants

The participants were recruited from the 26 JJAEP facilities listed with the TJJD. The researcher collected the contact information for the educators leading and teaching in the 26 JJAEPs from the TJJD. Once the educators' emails and other contact information were collected, the researcher sent a recruitment email and asked the educators to indicate their interest in participating in an interview by calling or emailing the researcher. Once the researcher heard from a participant who was interested, a time and place for the interview that was convenient to the participant were set as mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. If the participant preferred to have a web conference,

rather than a face to face interview, the researcher respected that request and used Skype or a similar web conferencing service that allowed for audio recording. All discussions were audio-recorded to produce transcription documents that were used for the data analysis and coding. Rev.com was the transcription service used; Rev.com was a private account-based service and required account holders to establish password protection for the use of the service. All participants signed informed consent documents and were informed about their rights to the interview. The voluntary nature of their participation and how to withdraw from the study were discussed.

Analysis of Research Questions

Prompts were derived from the interview guide developed directly from the research questions developed. The idea behind this strategy was to ask an overarching question that facilitated a conversation with each participant about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The major prompts used for the interview guide included a few supporting questions that could be asked if the significant prompt did not generate enough conversation with the participant to answer the research question. The prompts and interview questions were developed to understand the phenomenon of the educators' perspectives.

A few examples of prompts related to the research questions included asking for a description of the leader's involvement in an intervention that helped a student gain academic skill. Also, the guide contained a prompt on involvement in an intervention that taught a student better behavior for the classroom. The guide contained a prompt to inquire about promoting college and career and military readiness (CCMR) to help

students plan for employment during or after high school. The prompt related to transition planning was designed to gain an in-depth description of the process, such as including social services and home schools in preparing transition plans.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed the five JJAEP educational leaders and administrators in a one-on-one format about their lived experiences with this educational phenomenon. The researcher recruited and interviewed the five JJAEP administrators after receiving approval to research from The University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Research Board (IRB). Once IRB approval was obtained, the researcher collected the contacts from the TJJD and sent the recruitment email to the educators included in the email list. The recruitment email provided information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the expected length of the interview, and the informed consent process. The researcher received approval from the interested participant. A convenient time and place for the meeting were mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. If the participant preferred to have a web conference, rather than a face to face interview, the researcher respected that request and used Skype or some similar web conferencing service that allowed for audio recording.

Interview appointments were no more than 60 minutes to honor the participants' time. All interviews were audio-recorded to produce transcription documents that were used for the data analysis and coding. Rev.com was the transcription service used. Rev.com was a private account-based service and required account holders to establish password protection for the use of the service. All participants signed informed consent

documents and were informed about their rights, the voluntary nature of their participation, and how to withdraw from the study.

The researcher took field notes during interviews that were used for guiding the data coding process of a transcribed interview. The researcher used pseudonyms, such as Leader 1 (L1), Leader 2 (L2), etc., or District (D1), District (D2), etc. for each participant based on the position held and order in which the participant is interviewed. Confidentiality is assured through the use of the pseudonyms in addition to masking the locations at which the JJAEPs are located. The JJAEP service areas were based on counties in Texas. The regional geographic designations by which participants were described as serving represented North Texas (which includes the counties of Collin, Dallas, Denton, Hopkins, Johnson, and Tarrant), Central Texas (which includes the counties of Bexar, Bell, Hill, Hays McLennan, Travis, Williamson), Southeast Texas (which includes the counties of Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jefferson, and Montgomery), South Texas (including Atascosa, Cameron, Hidalgo, Karnes, Nueces, Webb, and Wilson), and West Texas (which includes the counties of El Paso, Hale, Lubbock, Taylor, and Wichita).

All electronic data, such as digital audio recordings and document files, were maintained behind password protection. All electronic data and any printed copies of data were stored in a locked safe at the researcher's home office and used only by the researcher. The data were maintained according to the IRB's requirements following the completion of the study and were destroyed at the designated opportunity according to IRB requirements.

Researcher Positionality

I was, at the time of the study, an educator with 25 years of experience, including 11 years of experience as a principal of secondary schools and in my third year as the principal of a JJAEP. Therefore, I was involved directly in a JJAEP, but my focus was on the education leaders working at the other 25 JJAEPs in the state. There was no focus on interviewing any of the leaders working at the JJAEP at which I was principal; therefore, even though Tarrant County was part of the North Texas region, no participants were included in the study from Tarrant County's JJAEP. I reduced bias and improved opportunities for enriching the data by making this exclusion criterion part of the study. I used my epoché to generate a more extensive understanding of the phenomenon of the JJAEP in Texas as responsible for instructing students and promoting students' transitions to their home campuses. I focused on the true meaning of the phenomenon as it naturally emerges within the data, and the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness of the Data

Shenton (2004) referred to trustworthiness because of internal validity that seeks to ensure the study measures its intent. Shenton stated that trustworthiness follows in research through categories designed by Guba (1981). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the criteria developed to support qualitative research in a trusted setting (Shenton, 2004). Credibility represents a form of internal validity by ensuring that the questions asked of the participants are focused on the intended purpose of the study (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is "is concerned with the

extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Shenton, 2004, p. 64) and explains the value of representing how the results can be used across populations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed dependability as the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that sufficient data have been collected for saturation of data that support the reader being able to reliability apply the findings as valid. Finally, confirmability means that the researcher ensured the findings could be read by others and viewed as reliable representations of the phenomenon as shared by the participants rather than as findings built upon the biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

It was critical to acknowledge researcher biases and ensure the study was rationally sound by bracketing through epoché. Bracketing involved mind-mapping what the researcher knew about the phenomenon and enabled the researcher to remain non-judgmental about the data received from the participants (Tattersall, Watts, & Version, 2007). The idea was not to impede the perception of the phenomenon at the heart of the study (Tattersall et al., 2007). The researcher generated a narrative about the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon in addition to coding the data generated by the participants.

The researcher used the design to seek multiple perspectives from JJAEP educators. An accurate analysis of data occurred as the study design was processed through trustworthiness criteria. The researcher shared the codes with debriefing partners who were peers and able to review the codes objectively alongside the data and help the researcher acknowledge the role of epoché. For example, when developing themes based on the codes that emerge into patterns from the participants' data, the researcher needed

to refrain from allowing any preconceived personal ideas about transition planning in a JJAEP to affect the findings. The researcher acknowledged that emergent themes could run contrary to the researcher's beliefs about transition planning at the JJAEP. Finally, by adhering to all ethical considerations, as described earlier, participants' data, identities, and locations built trust in the findings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began by comparing the transcriptions of the interviews to the audio recordings during replays of each interview to ensure accuracy in the transcriptions. Each participant's interview was labeled according to the participant's pseudonym so that only pseudonyms were used for any references to any participants' data. Any speaking by the researcher was removed from each participant's interview transcription as only the participants' data matter for the analysis. The researchers' field notes generated from the interviews were used for determining if the key words written by the researcher match any of the codes generated from the participants' data. Open coding of keywords, phrases, and sentences representing participants' actions and opinions was conducted as part of reducing bias in the findings. Axial coding of emerging codes was done based on the research questions and assisted with forming categories and understanding how they intertwine. Dedoose qualitative software was used to organize the data by their codes and finalize the themes.

At every stage of coding, the researcher kept notes for reflecting on the categories and reviewed those notes regularly. Examples of notes included writing codes on post-it notes, using color coding between copies of transcriptions, and adding spontaneous

memo writing to help with coding. The data's codes addressed the educators' perceptions and beliefs about the phenomenon. Data were understood based on the categories in which they fit. The key to axial coding was a consistent referral to the research questions.

Limitations of the Phenomenological Study

There were two conditions found in conducting the phenomenological study that affected the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for instruction in a JJAEP. The leaders were employed by the districts that contracted with a county juvenile justice program to provide academic services for expelled students. The educational leaders referred to the district and county procedures when describing their experience and knowledge in carrying out their work at the JJAEP program. The participants' experiences may not transfer to the JJAEP leaders of other counties as each county in Texas has its own expectations for student growth. Three of the five leaders consistently referred to the county juvenile justice program in their responses. One of the leaders suggested including county personnel who handled student behavior in the interview and referenced those personnel in responses; this represented the second limitation in the study. Regarding student behavior interventions, the firsthand experiences of the leaders could represent an experience that does not transfer to other JJAEPs.

The title of the education leader may not align with other district titles for the role of a leader of a campus or program. One JJAEP leader was titled Coordinator, two leaders were titled Principal, and two leaders were titled Director. The titles and roles and responsibilities resulted from coordination between the counties and districts as well as based on leaders' experience and each county juvenile justice system's expectations for

the role of the JJAEP leader. Some JJAEPs may operate with less emphasis on county expectations than others, such as the larger programs operating with county personnel managing behavioral aspects of the JJAEP and the district personnel managing the instructional interventions only. Based on their titles, the participants might have undergone different experiences with the phenomenon that influenced their perspectives about their roles and responsibilities as JJAEP educational leaders.

The special role that JJAEP plays in the Texas structure for education involves overlapping authorities and responsibilities for the teachers and administrators, involving unique questions for their ultimate responsibilities regarding the college, career, or military preparedness of high school seniors. For reasons of efficiency, this study was limited by obtaining the sole perspectives of five educational leaders assigned to their respective JJAEPs in Texas. This limitation precluded the ability to make observations or comments from the perspectives of teachers, students, or administrators beyond the five leaders who were interviewed. This inability to generalize also prevented the use of the observations as best practices among JJAEPs across the state.

Chapter Summary

The methodology of this study about the lived experiences of those responsible for the instruction for students in a JJAEP was phenomenology. Interviews were used to collect the data that were analyzed to understand the intervention and transition methods the educational leaders considered effective for at-risk students. This chapter presented the procedures of completing the data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 contains the

findings. Chapter 5 contains the discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusion to the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the JJAEPs in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within these schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses. The interviews were conducted to collect the participants' lived experiences of working at a juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP). The following three research questions guided the phenomenological study of the JJAEP:

1. What are the experiences with instructional interventions that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
2. What are the experiences with promoting college and career readiness among students that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
3. What is the transition programming experiences for students returning to their local, traditional campuses that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?

The participants ideas about academic and social-emotional interventions and views and experiences to increase student performance while enrolled at a JJAEP were included in the data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the phenomenological study of education leaders of JJAEPs in Texas. This chapter provides an overview of the participants and their respective programs. The themes that emerged are presented according to the research questions to which they apply. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings and preview of Chapter 5.

Overview of the Participants

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the researcher recruited five participants leading JJAEPs that supported students in Grades 9 through 12 in Texas. A complete picture of each participant is presented in this chapter for understanding each participant's experience with the phenomenon. The participants were labeled Leader 1 (L1), Leader 2 (L2), Leader 3 (L3), Leader 4 (L4), and Leader 5 (L5) to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality.

Five participants shared their years of experience in education and years of service at a JJAEP. Two males and three females participated in the study. Three participants identified as White, one as African American, and one as Hispanic. Table 1 provides a summary of the five participants' most frequently mentioned characteristics. The table summarizes the of the five leaders as they described themselves in the interviews regarding their years of service in education, years at a JJAEP, program type of facility, leader experience, race, and gender. More detailed information about the five leaders appears in Chapter 4 during the presentation of the findings of this phenomenological study.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5
Years in Education	26	23	16	25	23
Years at the JJAEP	3	10	11	21	4
JJAEP Model	Therapeutic	Therapeutic	Therapeutic	Therapeutic	Therapeutic
JJAEP Grade Levels	4-12	6-12	6-12	4-12	6-12
Race/Ethnicity	White	White	African American	Hispanic	White
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female

Participant's experience of leading teachers in a JJAEP ranged from 4 to 21 years. Four JJAEP leaders had over 20 years of service in education. L3 had 16 years of service in education. Education leaders' years in education include experiences in middles school and high school as an administrator. Two leaders (L1, L5) had middle school experience, two leaders (L2, L3) had high school experience, and one leader (L4) had both middle school and high school experience.

The participants shared experiences relevant to this study that included professional development, teacher evaluation systems, and district curriculum and standards for the academic growth students attending JJAEPs. All of the participants (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5) were familiar state standards used by their district and the district systems developed for student academic development. The participants engaged in the feedback and monitoring of educational standards and state standards as well as the monitoring of teachers using interventions that included response to intervention (RTI), Special Education programming, LEP programming, and support of students coming and

going out of a JJAEP. More relevant to the study, participants described their involvement in teacher growth and development and the monitoring and feedback of teachers working in JJAEPs.

All five facilities were identified as therapeutic models as determined by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD, 2018). The "therapeutic models place a strong value on counseling and behavior management" (TJJD, 2018, p. 32). The TJJD reported these programs:

> Offer students a variety of services in addition to the required educational and behavior management programming. These program components are similar across most JJAEPs and may include individual, group, and family counseling, substance abuse counseling, life skills classes and community service. (p. 34)

Two of the five facilities had a middle school and high school program separated from each other. All facilities used the largest school district's human resources department for hiring education personnel. All facilities had one education leader and five to eight teachers who were responsible for the educational component of the program. All facilities had a Texas Juvenile Justice department manager who worked in conjunction to the education leader. Also, all programs had behavior managers that worked with the students.

Leader 1

The JJAEP program design supports 44 students. Six females and 38 males. The program included students in elementary grades beginning with Grade 4 and served all

secondary grades through Grade 12. The TJJD program separated the students as elementary, middle, and high school.

L1 shared that the county "still keeps sixth grade in elementary," although the school district supported Grade 6 in middle schools. Middle school was described as Grades 7 and 8 and high school as Grades 9 through 12. At the time of the interview, L1 did not have any students in Grade 12. L1 stated the program had 23 students due to mandatory expulsion from their home schools and 21 students who were either court-ordered or discretionary. L1 noted that the program supports five different school districts in academic development for students. The program used the districts' curricula to be aligned with meeting students' educational needs. When addressing the varied districts' expectations, L1 said, "We try to align as much as possible [but] if not possible we stick strictly to the core." The program used T-TESS as the teacher evaluation system.

The program had four high school teachers, one junior high teacher and one elementary teacher to support students. The program also had one special education teacher and three paraprofessionals. L1 said, "You never have enough personnel" and believed the program "could have at least one more paraprofessional." The leader shared that the program was split with serving middle school and high school levels. Each school operated in its own building. The leader addressed an increase of students during the previous school year, stating the program "needed the extra help because of the extra population." The current year involved serving fewer students at the time of the interview. L1 stated that the county TJJD "handles the discipline" for the program, which

helped make the program successful: “As far as programs go, I think what we are doing is good.”

Leader 2

L2’s JJAEP program supported 78 students, including “14 girls and 64 boys.” L2 indicated that the program serves students “as young as fourth grade, ten years old, basically.” The program served students in Grades 6 through 12. L2 shared how the program was separated by middle school (Grades 6-8) and high school (Grades 9-12). The program had five students in Grade 12, and six students in Grade 11 noted as “being behind” academically. L2 shared that the program had 54 mandatory expulsion students, 19 discretionary expulsion students, and 5 court-ordered students. L2 noted that the program supported seven school districts in academic development for students. The program used the districts’ curricula that aligned the curriculum with Texas standards with meeting students’ educational needs. The program was facilitated with a coordinator as the leader at the JJAEP. The coordinator was the participant in the interview. A principal was responsible for JJAEP and the detention center for that school district and county program. When addressing the varied district expectations, L2 said, “The standards we use over here: We follow our school district, or we actually follow all of the school districts.”

The program had four high school teachers and two junior high school teachers who split content. One middle school teacher taught math and science. The other middle school teacher taught language arts and social studies. The program employed four juvenile supervision officers (JSO) to handle discipline of the students. T-TESS was the

teacher evaluation system. L2 used a strong voice to say, “Each year, we’re getting better and better!”

The county’s juvenile probation board managed the discipline for L2’s program. The county leader and L2 work in conjunction to support student academic and behavioral development. L2 provided a copy of the JJAEP student code of conduct that every student and their parents receive upon enrollment.

Leader 3

The leadership of this JJAEP program is shared with four other disciplinary alternative educational programs within the school district. L3 could not provide the number of students at the JJAEP since she is “housed” at a separate facility and does not keep up with the enrollment numbers specifically. L3 stated that “an AP [Assistant Principal] runs JJAEP. I depend on her for a lot of this information.” L3 shared that the program supported seven school districts for expelled students, whether for mandatory or discretionary reasons.

The program served students enrolled from Grade 6 to Grade 12. There were three teachers and two paraprofessionals for the program. The program used the districts’ curricula that aligned the curriculum with Texas standards with meeting students’ educational needs. L3 used T-TESS as the teacher evaluation model and report to the school “at least once a week” to monitor teacher behavior and facilitate instruction.

The program used TJJD probation officers for discipline. The leader shared that the class sizes are so small that “the teachers are capable of handling the minor issues,

and the probation officers handle the rest." The leader believed "the staff is number one" and was very pleased with the work they performed.

Leader 4

L4's JJAEP program supported 18 students (2 females and 16 males), which was the smallest number of students served by any of the programs. The TJJD program housed both middle school and high school in the same facility. The facility was located in a portable operating adjacent to the detention center. The program currently had students enrolled from Grade 6 to Grade 10. There were no juniors or seniors in the program at the time of the interview.

All the leaders shared using online interventions through Edgenuity to help support students as well as gain credits for courses previously not passed. L4 stated the program had four students due to mandatory expulsion from their home school, eight students due to discretionary expulsions, and six students whom the court-ordered to the JJAEP. L4 noted that the program supported the academic development of students representing six school districts. The program used the districts' curricula that aligned the curriculum with Texas standards with meeting students' educational needs and Edgenuity online programming for students in Grades 10 through 12. L4 said, "We use Edgenuity [but] we do not like it." The leader expressed that the district curriculum "fits well" with the students at the JJAEP. The program used T-TESS as the teacher evaluation system.

The program had five teachers to deliver both middle school and high school curricula. The program also employed one special education teacher. L4 stated, "I really like what we do academically." Discipline management was handled by the county, and

L4 abided by the system set by the county program. The county officer "has a door right next to me, so I just send discipline to her." The program provided a parent/student handbook and a student code of conduct to every enrolled student and their parents.

Leader 5

L5 was the facilitator of three disciplinary alternative educational programs (Insights, DAEP, JJAEP) within a large school district. The leader shared that the JJAEP program supports six school districts for students that were expelled for mandatory or discretionary reasons. L5 had a coordinator who guided the day-to-day work at the JJAEP. L5 could not provide the number of students at the JJAEP since the meeting was held at a different site.

The program enrolled students in Grades 6 through 12, but current had no Grade 12 students. There were four general education teachers, one special education teacher, and one paraprofessional employed in the program. The program used the districts' curricula that aligned the curriculum with Texas standards with meeting students' educational needs. L5 used a district-developed teacher evaluation model and reports that the system "works well." L5 said the employed teachers in this JJAEP "are average" in instruction and added, "My teachers are not capable of keeping control of the class and providing engaging instruction."

The program used the TJJD's JSOs for discipline. L5 shared, "My teachers struggle with discipline, and the teacher count on the JSOs to manage behavior in the classroom." The program began using restorative discipline practices as outlined by the Texas Education Agency (2019a) for the first time in the current school year. Restorative

Discipline Practices (RDP) occur as "a relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior" (Texas Education Agency, 2019a, para. 4). The Texas Education Agency (2019a) in conjunction with the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue began RDP in 2015. L5 was unsure of its effect on improving student behavior.

Overview of the JJAEPs' Programming and Interventions

Table 2 presents the program areas addressed in the interviews and which leaders discussed having those programs and interventions. The narrative of a shared experience of curriculum and instruction following home district guidelines was expressed by all five participants. Additionally, the narrative described how social-emotional interventions were more prevalent in supporting students in the program. The program areas included varied tools used to address both curriculum and instruction and social emotional interventions. CCMR was understood but not implemented at each JJAEP. Transition programming was not consistent between the five JJAEPs. Each of the research question's findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Program Areas Addressed by JJAEPs

Program Area	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5
Follows district guidelines for curriculum and instruction	X	X	X	X	X
Applies RTI		X		X	
JJAEP teachers create interventions	X		X	X	
Use social emotional interventions	X	X	X		X
CCMR is understood	X	X	X	X	X
CCMR with dual credit	X	X	X		
CCMR with AP		X	X		
CCMR with social services promoted					X
Transition knowledge	X	X	X	X	X
Transition-TJJD 45-day plan		X	X		
TJJD programming responsible for transition	X	X		X	X
Use transition officers		X	X		
JJAEP teacher is involved in transition	X		X	X	

Findings for the Research Questions

The findings were developed to answer the three main research questions. The research questions were designed to provide an understanding of education leaders' experiences with interventions, CCMR, and the transition planning involved in returning

students to their home schools. The data were analyzed to reveal themes manually and with the Dedoose qualitative analysis system. The researchers' field notes generated from the interviews were used for determining if the key words written by the researcher match any of the codes generated from the participants' data. Themes were developed through triangulation between the data reviewed and the researchers' field notes. As the themes developed from the research questions the responses that occurred between all five participants were used for analysis.

The presentation of each research question's findings contains selected quotes that support the emergent themes. Even through their varied educational backgrounds, participants emphasized the significance of interventions, CCMR, and transition. The participants provided relevant examples by including their prior and emerging experiences about developing systems for intervention, and transitions for students they enrolled who were returning to home schools. The participants also provided the struggles they experienced in college/career readiness and transition planning for student returning to their home school. Details on the methods used for identifying the themes are addressed within the findings for each research question. The first research question was answered by two themes. The second and third research questions were each answered by a single theme.

Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question was answered by two themes that addressed both a literal and programmatic description of the participants' conceptualization of

instructional interventions used in a JJAEP. The two themes are presented as subsections for this research question and are the following:

Theme 1: JJAEP Curriculum and Instruction Follow District Guidelines

Theme 2: JJAEPs Focus on Social-Emotional Interventions with Students

Theme 1: JJAEP curriculum and instruction follow district guidelines. All five leaders followed their districts' curriculum and instruction for academic interventions with students (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5). The five leaders stated a practice of using curriculum and instruction that included interventions that was developed by the home district. The leaders shared that the districts' curriculum and instruction plan supported students at a JJAEP. L1 shared how "each teacher is actually given an outline of when things are to be taught with interventions that are flexible depending on the student." L2 stated it was necessary to stay aligned to the district because "we're constantly being given information from the curriculum and instruction department to make sure we are teaching like everyone else." L3 had "experienced previously … with a Title I school, so I'm familiar with having interventions"; however, "we don't have any special programs for the students; we use what the district provides." L3 noted how minimal expectations were provided for the leader of a JJAEP. L3 did not "have any interventions, so I developed the intervention plan for my students."

Furthermore, L4 said following district curriculum as working "here with the kids because we're so small." L4 added, "I think the curriculum itself is well set and aligned." L4 agreed with using district curriculum and instruction as an academic intervention for students at JJAEP. L4 stated how "nothing is different than what the district sets in

place." While agreeing about interventions being provided by the home district, L5 shared the experience of creating individualized intervention plans as needed for students: "My experience has been that it's more case by case [and] campus by campus."

Two of the leaders (L2 and L4) addressed RTI as the district intervention that was developed by the student's home campus. L2 shared that "RTI is a tier that we do use, but we don't create it." L2 maintains contact with the home district that "tells us what we need to do." L4 shared how the program uses RTI interventions in a class remediation setting. "The stuff that we do is we have the RTI in the afternoon. We'll go back and reteach when needed." Both L2 and L4 mentioned RTI yet had no documented design of RTI in practice.

Three leaders (L1, L2, and L4) addressed having teachers create or develop their own interventions for students in their classes. L1 stated, "They have to track their interventions on the students, and so I'll check up on that." L2 shared how "in monitoring teachers, interventions is a part of the conversation with the teachers." L2 shared that teachers "have been tracking academic interventions." Also, L4 addressed how teachers were supporting students by doing "a lot of reteaching for a lot of our kids."

In bringing this theme in perspective, all leaders (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5) shared that they did not develop interventions on their own. L4, L5 expressed using the district support systems and followed those systems with the students at the JJAEP. L1 simply followed "the curriculum and standard." L2 addressed instructional intervention as "whatever is happening in a comprehensive school should be happening at the alternative school so that there's no gap." L3 shared how the developed interventions are "constantly

being given from the curriculum and instruction department, and we're filling in the gaps." L4 addressed interventions as "the same way as everyone else. As I said, they prepare us the same way as everyone else." L5 indicated the "instructional standards are outlined by the district."

Theme 2: JJAEPs focus on social-emotional interventions with students. Four leaders (L1, L2, L3, L5) emphasized the social-emotional interventions more strongly than the academic interventions. The four leaders spoke of services and teachers' behaviors for supporting students' emotional states during JJAEP enrollments with social-emotional interventions that include relationships with students, rapport with the students, and getting to know the students on a personal level. These types of interventions are well known as support for at-risk students and are used in traditional schools as well. As L4 said, social-emotional interventions can "inform instruction."

L1 shared, "There is a multitude of counselors that are provide by the county." L2 expressed how the teachers maintained "consistency" to help the students stay focused on the coursework. L2 spoke of "teacher rapport" that showed support for the students' emotional states in class. L4 shared how the teachers developed relationships with the students to build "trust that can then be shown in academic behavior." L3 spoke of a teacher who engaged students in the work and how this teacher had the students "thinking out of the box which draws the kids in and engages them." L4 addressed how the teachers know when to recognize "when a student is struggling or having a problem."

Research Question 2 Findings

Theme 3: Minimal implementation opportunities exist to support CCMR at a JJAEP was the single theme emerged for this research question. The JJAEPs had minimum availability of accelerated courses, including advanced placement (AP) and dual credit courses for use with the students. All facilities had to depend on the home district to support advanced placement courses as none of the teachers they monitored were certified in gifted and talented to teach upper-level courses. Two of the five leaders (L1, L2) had experience with students in dual enrollment courses; however, the coursework was supported by the local college rather than by the JJAEP program.

L1 currently did not have any seniors in the facility. It noted the training he had received on CCMR was provided by the educational service center (ESC) in his area and that he voluntarily signed up for this training. L1 had difficulty trying to address CCMR and said, "I'm just going to leave it at that, I honestly don't know" how the JJAEP can support CCMR.

L1 noted that the program did not "actually do pure AP classes" yet had teachers qualified to teach upper-level courses. Those teachers were used to address the upper level courses as needed. L1 stated, "We're very fortunate" in having a math and science teacher that "are very qualified" in teaching the upper-level courses.

L2 did have some understanding of dual enrollment for students and accelerated programming. L2 noted the local college as the support system for dual enrollment. L2 said, "If a student comes to us that's actually doing dual enrollment at the moment, we do

try to continue that through the local college here that does the dual enrollment with the school district."

L2 had no developed CCMR accountability plan that could be viewed or shared. L2 indicated minimal support of advanced placement courses or accelerated courses. L2 added that "a lot of times the students will go on a minimum plan instead of doing a foundation plan and the students are losing credit" by dropping down in the graduation plan. L2 also indicated credit recovery was used at "just the basic" level. Credit recovery involves enabling "at-risk students to re-take a previously failed course required for high school graduation and earn credit if the student successfully completes the course requirements" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 1). The strategy was designed to provide a pathway for high school students who have a history of course failure and help them avoid falling further behind in school (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015).

L2 noted the practice of using general equivalency diploma (GED) for students that is not included in the CCMR accountability design. L2 said, "It's a county plan and is a big component here because we have kids that are aging out." L2 further responded, "Not that I push GED, but I give it as an option because I know some of these kids are never going to go to college." L2 stated she "mentored the seniors."

L3 addressed CCMR with awareness of the state accountability process. L3 stated, "I've made myself aware, and I've studied" the expectation but noticed that the students were not interested in college or military. L3 spoke of academic demands that were needed to support the students. L3 displayed more understanding of CCMR, had knowledge of CCMR's importance, but recognized "in the alternative campus, we're not

being held accountable for CCMR." L3 noted that the CCMR expectations were "tied back to the home campus" and not a part of the JJAEP's programming. L3 mentioned the JJAEP students participated in a career day with the support of the JJAEP's counselor as part of promoting CCMR with the students. Having the counselor on the JJAEP campus created more support for the students. The counselor helped L3 with appropriate support between the home campus and JJAEP, particularly when scheduling students and supporting students in upper-level courses because the JJAEP could not offer AP or dual enrollment courses. The counselor, in conjunction with L3, created the appropriate course schedules for students' academic goals.

L4 stated, "We don't really do dual enrollment or college prep here." Dependence from the home school counselor was stated in pushing advanced programming for students needing any type of upper level instruction. L4 referred to CCMR as a practice that is not used and added, "To be quite honest with you, we refer back to the home campuses on CCMR." L4 had negative awareness and response to CCMR and shared the following: "In all honesty, we know a lot of the kids are not going to college. The students flat out say, 'School is not for me,' and I get that."

L5 had not received procedures or expectations for promoting CCMR, so L5 offered minimal conversation regarding the state accountability system for students to graduate college and career ready. Instead, L5 focused on social service support with students in the classroom. L5 responded as not being "necessarily graded under that system" and did not have a clear direction that supported CCMR. L5 expressed having a lack of resources to support CCMR and said it was "very difficult "to implement. L5 also

struggled with accelerated instruction that included AP courses and dual enrollment courses because the "teachers struggle with accelerated programming," resulting in the practice not occurring in the JJAEP. An understanding was shared by L5 that students were "dropped from the AP and dual enrollment classes" while enrolled at JJAEP, but upon return to the home school, they could continue to work on those classes.

All leaders provided their understanding of CCMR. Their knowledge was based on information provided by the school districts they supported or by ESC due to having a personal desire to understand the standards. However, accountability practices supporting CCMR was implemented differently from each leader and only L3 indicated making an active effort with the JJAEP counselor to promote it. Overall, all five JJAEPs, shared how the state's CCMR accountability standards and expectations were not effectively monitored or implemented in the JJAEPs. Leaders attempted to compensate by fitting CCMR into other systems of the JJAEP. The leaders shared the understanding of JJAEPs not being rated in the state's CCMR accountability system; thus, minimally promoted the accountability expectations. Credit recovery and condensing a graduation plan indicates best practices for the leaders in place of pushing students through accelerated programming. The accountability stays with the district that the student comes from holds the accountability for the students while enrolled. This knowledge explains why a JJAEP does not hold students accountable for advanced or upper level courses.

Research Question 3 Findings

Theme 4: Comprehensive transition planning is undeveloped at a JJAEP was the single theme emerged for this research question. All five leaders were familiar with

the expectation of developing transition plans, yet they all had trouble actively providing an effective system for students transitioning back into their home districts and schools. The leaders were aware of the expectation of transition planning even though the actual documentation and practice did not happen. The five leaders (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5) understood what a transition plan was; however, three of the five leaders had no developed plans for the students enrolled at the JJAEP program.

L1 shared that there is no plan developed because "it is just conversation." L1 explained how the transition is "done by the county." L2 also shared, "We have to do it per TJJD." L2 mentioned using the transition forms designed by TJJD that is sent back with the students. The form includes grades and performance of the student. L3 stated an assistant principal at the JJAEP "facilitates the transition plan with the assistant principal at the home school." The AP (assistant principal) meets with the student and the home school counselor on academic growth prior to returning to the home school. L4 uses a counselor from the county program to transition students back to traditional school. L4 said that the counselor "basically works with the schools." L5 shared how the program was "trying to figure out how to implement and what plan should be in place to support students," leaving the JJAEP but struggled with developing a plan to cover students returning to the various school districts.

The TJJD in all the facilities expected the education leader to develop the plan but no clear design has been developed to use. Education leaders were not held accountable to the transition plan thusly no leader made active push to develop the plan. All the leaders used the necessities in transitions that included student grades and social

performance when leaving. Two of the five education leaders (L2, L3) shared a 45-day transition plan designed by TJJD they use to send to home schools for addressing academic and behavioral progress. The plan included the student's academic grades and any behavioral concerns the teacher may want to share with the home school about the student. The plans were sent to the home school by the TJJD case managers and contained no direct communication from the JJAEP education leader. Three of the five leaders (L1, L4, L5) shared that the county personnel were responsible for the transition plan and held conversations with the education leader about grades. Two of the leaders (L3, L4) had transition officers to support students in transitioning back to the home campus.

Three of the leaders (L1, L3, L4) shared that some teachers at the JJAEP reach out to students' home campus teachers to discuss academic progress. All the participants mainly communicated with the counselors at the home schools about students' academic development during JJAEP enrollment. L2 reached out to the home schools to share academic development news and for "making sure that the person that's responsible for that kid's instructional support services is getting the information." All leaders shared they do not align transition planning to any instructional support services. No leaders developed transition plans based on students' ages, genders or types of disability.

L1 shared that transitions are "done by the county" with the education leader providing academic information as requested. The teachers at the JJAEP contacted the home schools' teachers to let the home schools' teachers know how students performed during JJAEP enrollment. L1 said, "My teachers will contact the homeschool teachers to

let them know how this student was performing, where the teacher was in the curriculum, and if the student was on track." L1 continued to share how the teachers would speak with the home schools' teachers frequently to share what state-mandated curriculum content was being taught and how the student completed the assignments. L1 allowed the teachers to oversee students' academic development and determine how academic development information was shared with the home school.

L2 explained how the transition plan was developed based on TJJD standards. The program used a transition form developed by TJJD that was given to students and the school district "once the student was exiting." The transition form included an exit letter that students would write to describe their experience of the JJAEP. L2 followed up in saying the facility also used a 45-day transition period once the students left JJAEP, where L2 visited each transitioning student's home school to check on the student. L2 shared how the therapeutic models allowed this type of transition to be successful because the program could address student's needs individually. The transition plan also facilitated collaboration between the JJAEP and the home school to continue supporting the students despite the reason enrollment in the JJAEP.

L3 provided a promising practice of transitions programming and understood transitioning as needed "by law to everybody who's transitioning from an alternative campus from the home campus." L3 used the JJAEP's AP as the point of contact for transitioning students back to their home campuses. The program used a 20 to 30-day review for students enrolled in the JJAEP for 60 days or less and 45-day review for students enrolled in the JJAEP for 90 or 180 days. The AP invited the home school

representative and the student's parents to each meeting to share news about the student's development, both academically and behaviorally. These meetings also included teachers and the student as needed. L3 found the transition plan they used worked well, and with support from the home districts, the plan reduced recidivism to either a minimum or nonexistence.

L4 expressed that the transition program was "not implemented well" and indicated that "transition was used more for special education students in high school." L4 and the teachers pushed "to make sure that the students finished the classes they were enrolled in and finished to get credit." L4 addressed that receiving credit was the primary goal but no transition design was used. L4 was unable to provide any transition design that is implemented for all students.

L5 spoke of a records keeper that completed the transition in moving students between the home school and JJAEP. The documentation was "just grades and sometimes having a teacher passing a note along with the grades." The records keeper was expected to get grades from the teachers, set up meetings for the home school and parents to attend with the education leader at JJAEP, and schedule "an exit meeting" between the education leader and the student before exiting the program. L5 shared, "Rarely do parents attend, but I do meet with all the students" because "lack of parental and school support is why we have kids come back." L5 identified the importance of transition planning and developed a transition plan that had been used for over a year at the district-level alternative school. L5 felt the plan worked with at the district-level alternative school but was unable to be implemented at the JJAEP due to minimum

support from the other school districts the JJAEP served and the lack of personnel to participate in transitioning students back to their home schools effectively. L5 stated, "We need to implement a transition plan at the JJAEP because, as of right now, there is no formal discussion or plan." L5 spoke of the county using the social services to develop the transition planning, but the system is not being effective for the students.

Summary of the Findings and Chapter

The phenomenon investigated in this study was the lived experiences of education leaders at a JJAEP. It was conducted to provide an understanding of the characteristics of this type of disciplinary alternative education system responsible for providing individualized supports to impact students' academics and behaviors. The data collected for this study came through interviews with five education leaders throughout Texas that used a therapeutic model based on the TJJD's program design. The data produced by the responses were analyzed using a phenomenological methodology. As the evidence of the lived experiences emerged, so did evidence of disjointed systems and processes in academic interventions, CCMR, and transition planning. The following were the research questions answered:

1. What are the experiences with instructional interventions that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having? (Theme 1 and 2)
2. What are the experiences with promoting college and career readiness among students that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having? (Theme 3)

3. What are the transition programming experiences for students returning to their local, traditional campuses that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having? (Theme 4)

Theme 1: JJAEP Curriculum and Instruction Follow District Guidelines

All the leaders offered an understanding of academic interventions and the value of using interventions for student academic development. The narrative contained evidence of a shared experience of curriculum and instruction based on the home district guidelines. The tools included RTI and the district curriculum.

Theme 2: JJAEPs Focus on Social-Emotional Interventions with Students

The leaders indicated that social, emotional interventions were more prevalent in supporting students in their programs. The leaders understood the concept of interventions. They described using various tools used to address social-emotional interventions. They had explicit knowledge that the interventions they applied were no different than those found at a traditional school.

Theme 3: Minimal Implementation Opportunities Exist to Support College, Career, and Military Readiness at a JJAEP

CCMR efforts presented a struggle for the participants because they had minimal opportunities to provide AP and dual enrollment in college experiences. They were primarily focused on ensuring students had opportunities for credit recovery. The leaders understood the state accountability system as related to JJAEP and how it could be implemented with students enrolled. However, they had no obligation to meet the demands of the state's CCMR accountability policy demands.

Theme 4: Comprehensive Transition Planning is Undeveloped at a JJAEP

The leaders were familiar with transition planning and used the county program to implement and development transition plans used for student to return to the home campus and district. However, transition planning endeavors posed a strain in implementation for the leaders. Minimal transition planning direction was given to the education leaders for supporting the students from various school districts in regard to returning the students to a traditional school setting. The leaders were knowledgeable of transitioning as designed by the county program that is in correspondence of the program. The county program acknowledged used of 45-day transition plans and county counseling services for the students as well as transition forms used for reporting on the academic performance of the students during their placement. Implementation of an effective transition plan was a struggle for the participating JJAEP leaders.

Preview of Chapter 5

The discussion of the findings, implications for practice and policy, and recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings with recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. Chapter 5 concludes the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of JJAEPs in Texas from the perspectives of the educational leaders responsible for the instruction within the schools and the transitions of students returning to their home campuses. The data were comprised of the participants' lived experiences in leading their respective JJAEPs, the type of disciplinary alternative education system charged with delivering individualized supports to impact students' academics and behaviors. Finally, the participants provided and described the structures and processes they considered to be necessary for their at-risk high school students' academic development and graduation preparation. The participants discussed way to reduce at-risk high school students' levels of recidivism. The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences with instructional interventions that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
2. What are the experiences with promoting college and career readiness among students that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?
3. What are the transition programming experiences for students returning to their local, traditional campuses that educational leaders of JJAEPs report having?

The study design was a qualitative phenomenological inquiry with data analysis that was primarily focused on transcribed audio recordings of interviews. The five participants were recruited from the population of JJAEP personnel leading 26 programs in the state of Texas. The data were collected through on-site interviews using the

researcher's interview guide. Some documents were provided to the researcher by participants. Moreover, strict adherence to ethical research practices guaranteed complete anonymity to the study participants through the use of pseudonyms that would not reveal the identities of the education leader, district, and program location. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the findings' themes and discussion of the findings. Next, implications for educational practitioners in a JJAEP and for policy are presented, followed by the recommendations for further study. The chapter ends with a conclusion to the study.

Summary of Findings

The phenomenon investigated in this study was the lived experiences of the education leaders of five JJAEPs. It was conducted to explore the participants' lived experiences within this type of disciplinary alternative education system in which they provided individualized supports for affecting at-risk students' academics and behaviors. The data collected for this study were derived from interviews with five education leaders of JJAEPs located throughout Texas. Each JJAEP used a therapeutic model based on the TJJD's program design. The data produced by the responses were analyzed using an existential-phenomenology approach. As the evidence of the lived experiences emerged, so did evidence of disjointed systems and processes in academic interventions, CCMR, and transition planning. The resulting themes described at length in Chapter 4 were the following:

Theme 1: JJAEP curriculum and instruction follows district guidelines

Theme 2: JJAEPs use social-emotional interventions with students

Theme 3: Minimal implementation opportunities exist to support CCMR at a JJAEP

Theme 4: Comprehensive transition planning is undeveloped at a JJAEP

Discussion of the Findings

The following is a discussion of the themes that answered the research questions. Each of the four themes is discussed concerning the literature or the specific policies to which they applied.

Theme 1: JJAEP Curriculum and Instruction Follows District Guidelines

Each JJAEP leader followed the curriculum of the district that employed the leader. All five leaders responded that the home campus or district provided the content to follow for ensuring student academic growth and expressed their confidence in the support system provided by the home campus or district. JJAEP leaders recognized the effectiveness of the curriculum design developed by the district. The leaders expressed their satisfaction with the curriculum used with their students and believed the curriculum applications at the JJAEP addressed students' differences and learning styles. The use of districts' curriculum allowed the participants to align academic monitoring at the JJAEP to meet the student's educational needs.

Additionally, the JJAEP leaders understood the state's curriculum requirements, known as the Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS enabled JJAEP teachers to provide engaging activities and valuable academic interventions, such as RTI. The leaders also referenced the TEKS when referring to district curriculum and instruction. The leaders' observations supported the Seigle et al. (2014) suggestion that

state standards for traditional schools be aligned with alternative education programs for ensuring students received a quality education.

The leaders' understanding of curriculum and instruction was aligned with the U.S. Department of Education's (2018) alternative education guidelines as well as the Texas Education Agency's (2007) requirement for JJAEPs and DAEPs to offer an innovative curriculum, including practices that are "self-paced, individualized, challenging and appealing to student interest" (p. 7). Two leaders discussed individualized learning for all students that occurred when teachers retaught content as needed. L2 shared, "I love the autonomy of educating the students because it lets us take care of the deeper levels because we know our kids." L3 noted how teachers engaged with students by having the students "thinking out of the box which draws the kids in." The leader noticed how teachers grasped the idea of interventions for students and used their skill in the classroom. L4 shared how teachers "do a lot of reteaching for a lot of our kids," which "is needed when a student is struggling or having a problem." L4 also said, "I studied in the correlation between curriculum and recidivism and having a good curriculum that I can individualize gives the students a better opportunity."

The five leaders' use of academic interventions like RTI was congruent with prior research findings. Samuels (2016) reported the value of utilizing RTI for at-risk students to ensure they receive a high-quality education built purposefully from research-based strategies to address specific problems had by students. L2 leaned on the home school campus for the academic interventions that could be used with the JJAEP students. L3 thought RTI complements how the JJAEP supported at-risk students.

Results from the interviews indicated the curriculum and instruction implemented comes from the district responsible for the students enrolled in the JJAEP. The five leaders' experience of the curriculum coming from the home district aligns with the literature on curriculum and instruction. Seigle et al. (2014) noted alternative education programs should be expected to receive the same academic services as they received at the regular school in support of maintaining progress toward 1/2 to 1 year of academic growth while in JJAEP placement. Also, progress was monitored for ensuring grade promotion and high school graduation. The findings aligned to the U.S. Department of Education's (2018) expectation for maintenance of academic growth even in a disciplinary alternative education program. To summarize, Themes 1 and 2 suggest students are expected to make progress regardless of the educational settings in which they are enrolled, including a JJAEP.

Theme 2: JJAEPs Use Behavioral Interventions With Students

The five educational leaders spoke of using behavioral interventions in conjunction with academic and social interventions. Morgan et al. (2014) further suggested how disciplinary alternative education programs have "the greatest need for improving students' academic, social, and emotional growth" (p. 366). The data were consistent with scholarly research in addressing social and behavioral interventions more prominently than academic interventions and referred to using research-based interventions to support students' social-emotional growth. The five JJAEP programs included discipline management and counseling services for behavioral interventions. Rennie Center (2014) determined that collaboration between various agencies, such as

mental health agencies, social service agencies, and juvenile justice services, offers a comprehensive level of interventions and strategies that benefit students. Literature supported the participants' shared experiences for interventions. The five participants agreed with the Rennie Center about those programs as supporting students' academic and behavioral management.

The leaders regarded behavioral interventions as increasing students' academic performance and motivation, a finding which supports assertions by Jolivette et al. (2001). Texas Education Agency (2007) included discipline management as one of the best practice strategies for helping at-risk students. Texas Education Agency also shared varied types of interventions for use at the campus or district level by teachers and leaders.

The JJAEP leaders spoke of teacher-driven interventions within each of their programs. Swanson (2013) summarized how behavioral interventions offer students the opportunity to understand their responsibility for the behavior that led to them being placed in a DAEP to reduce recidivism in DAEPs. For example, teachers offered emotional support to students and created individualized interventions. L2 shared how teachers "maintained a consistency that helped the student stay focused on the coursework" and tracked students' progress within each intervention. L2 concluded that teacher-student rapport within interventions was necessary for success to occur. L2's statements supported Coleman (2002), who addressed the "benefits of good relationships between students and teachers" (p. 220). Coleman also shared the value of

"communication for building rapport and trust among students and improving students' emotional well-being" (p. 227).

The five JJAEP leaders supported discipline management strategies for students as an intervention in each county's program. Strategies included point systems to improve positive behavior. The point system would provide rewards developed by the students and the management of the program. The education leaders supported using TJJD strategies, such as point systems, for generating opportunities for teachers to help students improve behavioral development. The point system practice was also recommended by Deed and DePaoli (2007) and Eichorn et al. (2014).

L2 shared how inventions are initiated by the county upon a student's JJAEP enrollment through an intake questionnaire to "pretty much assess how they have been feeling over the past few months." That information is then shared with the county's counselor, whom the student can see "at request." L3 said the county managed the JJAEP's "behavioral component so the kids can go to class and learn." L4 noted the behavioral interventions are supported by the county's counselors who "do all kinds of interventions."

The leaders applied multitiered supports, such as PBIS, social services, and RTI, a finding which supports recommendations by Jolivette et al. (2014) and Samuels (2016) and guidelines in ESSA (2015). This multitiered supports practice supports the literature on maximizing students' learning (Deed & DePaoli, 2007; Eichorn et al., 2014; NAEA, 2018). Rennie (2014) further suggested that the interventions need to be "clearly designed with high expectations for social-emotional, behavioral, and academic growth"

(p. 4). The leaders maintained high behavioral expectations of their JJAEP students, which implied they supported students wanting to pursue postsecondary readiness.

Theme 3: Minimal Implementation Opportunities Exist to Support College, Career, and Military Readiness at a JJAEP

While the JJAEP leaders are expected to make academic and behavioral gains, there was a struggle in providing higher level academic support for junior and senior students. The leaders did not provide much evidence of being able to apply the state's secondary CCMR requirement as part of their interventions or their transition planning. The state accountability system has indicators and ratings for CCMR that use to traditional schools but not to alternative education schools like JJAEPs (Texas Education Agency, 2019b). The state accountability system only provided ratings to conventional schools and school districts. Because JJAEPs are not rated in the accountability system, they do not have an incentive to promote CCMR among their students.

Texas JJAEPs have a responsibility for supporting students in accelerated learning programs, such as AP and dual enrollment (Welsch, 2015); however, the leaders reported this opportunity was missed. All leaders understand the accountability system expectations of CCMR yet struggle with implementation. The struggle of the accountability system is based on the TJJD standards that give a minimal expectation of instruction.

L1 referred to CCMR at a JJAEP as "very stagnant" and did not "know how a JJAEP can support CCMR." L1, L2, L4, and L5 explicitly admitted to having no developed strategy for students to complete AP courses or dual enrollment courses. L3

could support students in dual enrollment courses because of the connection with the local college. The five educational leaders suggested a lack of coordination between state and local education agencies, and the juvenile justice systems regarding college readiness. Cheek and Buchio (2017) argued a minimal direction in academic progression that supports the state accountability system that can be a significant risk for harming vulnerable, already at-risk students. Absence of college readiness opportunities can exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline in punishing students that are capable of higher level academia and postsecondary opportunities.

The leaders understood the nature of and need for students to attain CCMR at the primary, policy level. However, the leaders had only minimal data to share. The JJAEP leaders discussed their focus being about credit recovery to ensure senior students could graduate. They collectively did have a low expectation for JJAEP students entering college. The leaders also shared they had, at best, minimal support for ensuring students could continue or complete AP and dual enrollment courses. The JJAEP leaders contradicted recommendations from Just Children Legal Aid Justice Center (2004), NJJN (2016), and U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (2014) regarding the need for promoting postsecondary readiness.

Theme 4: Comprehensive Transition Planning is Undeveloped at a JJAEP

The leaders of this study shared minimal use of transition practices to support students returning to their home schools. Literature also helped the same perspective in addressing students in alternative education programs. Coles et al. (2009) noted that a useful transition frame includes decision-making, the identification of practical

instructional goals, and an opportunity for student growth during re-entry. Texas Education Code §37.008 (2016) required JJAEPs to provide transitional supports with structured activities and procedures as evidence of success for students returning to home schools or districts and to ensure students' assignments are facilitated with their traditional schools. Flower et al. (2011) shared the need for alternative education programs to produce positive student outcomes convincingly.

Unfortunately, none of the leaders reported having any clear transition design or model. L1 had no transition plan set up, and L2 simply responded, "We have to do transitions per TJJD." L3 referred to a plan that was delegated to an administrator but could not provide examples of the method in action. L4 referred to an on-campus counselor who implemented the transition plan and said the counselor "basically worked with the schools" rather than following a strategic transition plan. Finally, L5 developed a transition plan for the local disciplinary alternative education program but struggled with "trying to figure out how to implement the plan for students leaving the JJAEP." The transition plan findings indicate a need for developing more effective and explicit transition supports for Texas JJAEP students that are discussed in implications.

Implications for Practice and Policy

JJAEPs use district curriculum to support students academically and ensure academic development. JJAEP leaders used interventions for social and behavioral development. The leaders had the most to say about interventions and curriculum to support students' academic and behavioral development. However, CCMR and transition

planning were two areas with findings that lead to several implications for practice and policy.

JJAEP leaders need access to resources and greater collaboration with the leaders of the school districts they serve to ensure students have opportunities for developing CCMR by taking AP exams, completing dual enrollment courses, maintaining the students' original graduation plans, and preparing for the postsecondary Texas Success Initiative (TSI) college readiness assessments. If the state held JJAEPs to the same CCMR standards as the traditional school districts, then JJAEPs would have expanded access to services and programs that would benefit students and potentially reduce recidivism. It is notable that it has been more than ten years since Cortez and Cortez (2008) recommended holding DAEPs to the same performance and standards and requirements as regular schools and that the JJAEP leaders of this study indicated they had no available opportunities for supporting CCMR.

The JJAEP leaders noted that their students are forced to drop down to the foundation-only graduation plan, which requires fewer credits for graduation, removes the CCMR endorsement requirement, and reduces their likelihood for college readiness. Students who graduate with the state's distinguished graduation plan earn four more high school credits, have opportunities to master career tracks and foreign languages, and are likely to graduate from high school with transferrable college credit hours. However, JJAEPs are not designed for students who have mastered upper-level content areas, and as reported by the five leaders, support credit recovery under the assumption of all students being behind and likely to drop out.

Additionally, Grade 12 JJAEP students who want to go to college or enter the military cannot receive academic interventions for mastering the necessary assessments, such as the TSI, SAT, and ACT for college and the ASVAB for military enlistment. This lack of educational and CCMR interventions at the JJAEPs suggests the TJJD and Texas Education Agency need to revisit policies and promote restorative discipline program development that guides JJAEP students toward CCMR more actively and explicitly. State policymakers are encouraged to review the JJAEP instruction policies so that JJAEPs can enable students to complete upper-level and dual enrollment coursework either through direct instruction or online programming. Adjusting policies for ensuring students can do more than credit recovery could help at-risk, but high-functioning high school seniors maintain their graduation plans and their path toward CCMR. Based on the number of high school seniors the participants reported having on their campuses, there is a need for the state to provide resources and policies that could enable the JJAEP education leaders to develop the CCMR capacity in every student, particularly at-risk Grade 12 students.

Texas policies should explicate the roles of the JJAEP education leader who supports students, especially graduating seniors, to ensure CCMR. It is advantageous for TJJD to help CCMR as a program for reducing recidivism. However, TJJD and JJAEP leaders must work in conjunction with each other to design and support an effective CCMR intervention program. Furthermore, JJAEPs and school districts would have to work together if the state mandates that JJAEPs needed to meet the same CCMR standards as the state's school districts. JJAEPs need state agency support for changing

their operations to include resources for students to continue upper-level and AP courses, college preparation assessments, and postsecondary preparedness. Again, these interventions would support JJAEP students in learning CCMR skills and gaining opportunities to exit the school-to-prison pipeline (Texas Appleseed, 2010).

The lack of evidence for effective JJAEP-to-home-school transition practices creates several implications for the JJAEP level. House Bill 2184 was created in the 86th Legislation on Student Discipline under Chapter 37 TEC §37.023 for ensuring personalized transition plans could be developed. The TJJD and Texas Education Agency need a strategic joint-policy statement to guide successful transitions between JJAEPs and home schools. Further, JJAEPs should ensure cooperation with the home school and JJAEP as a part of the transition that includes involving the home school prior to dismissal from the program. Also, the transition should include a communication from the education leader, teachers, and support services that could offer improvements to students' behavioral and academic development while in the JJAEP. For JJAEPs that serve multiple school districts, all school districts' leaders must coordinate with each other and the JJAEP in developing a shared transition format for standardizing the successful re-entry of students into their home schools. Additionally, JJAEP leaders need professional development to ensure quality transitions occur and to decrease recidivism among high school students. By providing professional development about transitions standards, the state can create an accountability requirement for transitions and tie the need to recidivism rates as part of holding the JJAEP and the county's juvenile justice program in compliance with the transition standards. Including the appropriate personnel

in the plan is most important for holding the JJAEP and the home school accountable for ensuring students transition back into their home schools successfully. Utilizing systems that are in place and monitoring those processes may yield a stronger understanding of transitioning and create better practices for ensuring accountability to the plan of transitioning students back to the home school.

In addressing transition planning, JJAEPs and home school districts can engage with social and community support systems. JJAEPs should involve social services in the students' home area by providing opportunities to students who would benefit from continuing those services after being released from JJAEP. The health and human services professionals can ensure students' social-emotional wellbeing is monitored and can provide ongoing behavioral training to assist students transitioning back to their home schools. JJAEPs could be involved in connecting students and their families with effective social and community support systems by collaborating with home schools and school districts. Collaboration with home schools could help returning students and their families through family engagement and networking programs. Collaboration between home schools and JJAEPs could ensure behavioral change strategies used as interventions during enrollment at a JJAEP were effectively learned and developed. Students could avoid situations that would cause them to be re-assigned into a JJAEP.

Clearly, the appropriate personnel and supports at both the JJAEP and the home school must be made explicitly be available on an ongoing basis to students as they transition back into their home schools. Examples of appropriate personnel from home schools could be mentors, such as teachers and high school counselors. The TJJD could

provide students with social services through a designated behavioral counselor or a social worker who conducts visits at the students' schools or homes following their return to their home schools. As Tsang (2004) noted, there continues to be a need for a policy regarding multidimensional transition plans that students and their guardians can use for pursuing academic progress goals and CCMR as well as for obtaining social-emotional support services to continue the positive behavioral skills learned during JJAEP enrollment.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future studies that emerged from the findings of this phenomenological investigation with JJAEP educational leaders. First, a phenomenological study of the JJAEP teachers' and TJJD personnel's experiences with academic interventions to determine which ones they regard as most effective is needed. Using the lived experiences of the teachers and TJJD personnel who implement the academic interventions for promoting success could provide understanding about the academic needs and successes of JJAEP students.

Second, future researchers are encouraged to interview or survey current or former JJAEP students to learn how they feel supported and what their needs for support are to maintain academic development and improve their behavior. Students' perceptions about their experience in a JJAEP may be used to promotes academic and behavioral intervention improvements. Third, JJAEP teachers' experiences with curriculum and behavior interventions need to be collected to learn explicitly what activities and supports they provide to students in a JJAEP to maintain students' academic development and

improve student behavior. A case study that collects teachers' perspective about effective strategies and data regarding activities for at-risk students may provide an in-depth understanding about JJAEP effectiveness. Teachers could showcase what interventions and strategies work with these at-risk students.

Fourth, based on the data about CCMR interventions, there is a need for interviewing recently graduated seniors who were in upper-level course work, such as any dual enrollment course, AP course, pre-calculus, calculus, environmental science, astronomy, or any course noted as a Grade 12 academic course, at the time they were assigned to the JJAEP. The study could determine the CCMR benefits and costs to the higher achieving students enrolled in a JJAEP. In the study, the students could express the pros and cons of their experience in the JJAEP and how those experiences affected their enrollment and performance in postsecondary education.

Fifth, a comparison study of the perceptions of JJAEP leaders and district-level office personnel about high school students' academic and CCMR development study could be used to inform state policy on transition planning and accountability requirement affecting school districts. High school students, especially seniors, are most impacted when entering JJAEPs while enrolled in upper-level courses. JJAEPs could benefit from a strategic policy based on data collected about students' academic and CCMR development and graduation plans. The students' evaluations of transition planning could be used to understand how graduation requirements are impacted for students completing high school during JJAEP enrollment.

Next, a focus-group design could be used with JJAEP education leaders to learn what they recommend for aligning the academic, CCMR, and transition standards set by the Texas Education Agency and TJJD. The study may be used to determine what policy adjustments would support students within the current accountability system and how TJJD can better align the expectations to the state academic accountability system. Finally, a national survey of JJAEP educators may be used to find evidence of an effective design for transitioning students into their traditional schools following successful completion of the alternative education program. A national survey of effective transition plans for students in alternative education programs may also generate data to learn what interventions reduce recidivism among students within a disciplinary alternative education setting.

Conclusion to the Study

The three research questions' four themes emerged from this phenomenological study of five education leaders in a JJAEP. The participants' data were aligned with each other regarding curriculum and instruction. However, the participants struggled to provide CCMR and transition planning for their students returning to the home schools. Many similarities between the interviews from the education leaders and the literature occurred. Also, the data showed disparities in the intervention and transition systems between school districts, social service agencies, and state programs designed to support at-risk students. State accountability becomes a concern when JJAEPs server multiple school districts that could represent different rating levels. Therefore, the data revealed the need for constant communication between JJAEPs and school districts about

students' progress and in support of students' successful re-entry as well as strategic transition and CCMR models. An effective transition design could support students moving from campus to campus and to ensure the students receives appropriate supports academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. This study gave the researcher a better understanding of the best-practice strategies to use with students in a JJAEP so that this group of students does not feel left behind or ignored and can gain or continue a CCMR pathway that would reduce the recidivism likelihood.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

RQ1 major prompt: What are your experiences with instructional interventions at the JJAEP?

Supporting question a. Describe your involvement in an intervention that helped a student gain academic skill

Supporting question b. Describe your involvement in an intervention that taught a student better behavior for classroom success.

Supporting question c. Describe your involvement in an intervention that enables students to understand how their academic work and behaviors link.

RQ2 major prompt: What are your experiences with promoting college and career readiness among your students?

Supporting question a. Describe your involvement in promoting college and career readiness that helped your students plan for post-secondary school or employment during or after high school.

Supporting question b. Describe your involvement in promoting college and career readiness that helped your students prepare for admission to college.

Supporting question c. Describe your involvement in promoting college and career readiness to help your students to graduate using course selections that support the desired career or college goals.

RQ3 major prompt: What transition programming have you seen or been involved in for the process of successfully transitioning students back to their local campuses?

Supporting question a. Describe what transition planning activities happen between teachers at your JJAEP?

Supporting question b. Describe any partnership(s) between your JJAEP, students' home campus(es)/district(s), and/or any other social service agencies for decreasing students' recidivism rates?

Supporting question c. Who is involved in developing students' transition plans and who is responsible to keeping these plans in place, particularly after students return to their home campuses?

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